University of Alberta

On the Sidelines: The Experience of Young Women in Physical Education Classes

Margaret Louise Humbert

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Secondary Education

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **On the Sidelines: The Experiences of Young Women in Physical Education Classes** submitted by Margaret Louise Humbert in partial fullfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of young women in physical education classes. Recent research indicates that in high school when physical education programs become optional many young women decide not to continue their physical education experience. This phenomenon should be of interest to those professionals involved in the instruction, design, evaluation and promotion of physical education and physical activity programs.

Qualitative methodologies including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, journals, photography and document analysis were used to explore and understand the physical education experiences of young women. A case study focused the attention of the research on fifty young women in grades nine through twelve from one urban high school in a mid-sized Canadian prairie city.

Results indicated that young women wish to be physically active but find that existing physical education programs are not meeting their needs. Young women desire programs that offer opportunities to learn skills and participate in activities different from those offered in standard physical education programs. They wish to have fun in physical education classes, and have many opportunities to interact with friends in a single sex environment. Young women place a great deal of importance on the environment in which physical education occurs. They have little confidence in their bodies and their physical skills, and desire to be treated with respect by both their teachers and their classmates.

As a result of this study teachers are encouraged to involve young women in the design of physical education programs. As so many young women have a negative body image, physical education teachers should address this area in their curriculum and critically reflect on practices such as compulsory uniforms, showers and swimming classes. In addition, physical education teachers are encouraged to reflect upon their own behaviors and attitudes towards young women in physical education classes. If physical educators are willing to recognize the need to listen to, and address the concerns of, young women in physical education programs, they may encourage more young women to pursue a physically active lifestyle.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE STUDY

Introduction

While working on an action research project I had the opportunity to talk with several young women in grade ten and eleven about their experiences in high school physical education classes. Their stories compelled me to write the following story about an experience I had during the project.

> It was 3:50 as I headed into the physical education building. The time is significant as I was late. I had stopped to talk to one of my students and now I was late for the first day of my step aerobics class. I had never taken step aerobics before and I was kind of excited about the class but at the same time I was wondering why I felt the need to add one more thing to my day. I remember thinking that I could miss this one; but no, I kept going.
>
> I hurried into the pavilion, and as soon as I entered I could hear the music blaring. There at the end of the track near the wall was my class. There must have been thirty women in all. They all had steps and I looked for an extra one. There it was at the very front, "no problem" I thought, "I'll just sneak up the side and get it." It was rather heavy and I stumbled to the back row with it. Things were not going too well, but "no problem" I thought, "I can handle this." I put the bench down as my eyes found the instructor. Wow was she cute, and young, and she looked fit, not just skinny, but fit.

Come to think of it, everyone looked kind of young, "oh well" I thought, "I can handle this."

In no time I had picked up the rhythm, but hold it something was wrong. I was on the bench and everyone else was off, they were on and I was off, they turned to the right and I turned to the left. "Oh God", I almost tripped the girl in front of me. "What is going on?" I wondered. I can always pick up stuff like this. I quickly looked around the class and noticed that myself and a very heavy girl just ahead of me were the only two who were not in time. My anxiety began to rise, I could feel my heart pounding. It was then that I noticed a group of young guys watching the class. I shuddered, "oh god they are watching me" I thought. I looked around and realized that there was someone watching from the stands, and there were also people on the track. "Oh no" I thought, "they are all watching me and thinking, look at that older lady at the back, she is really bad."

I wanted the class to end so that I could just slip into the locker room. As I was thinking that, I almost fell off the back of the bench. We were now in a totally different configuration. And then it got worse. The smiley, fit, cute instructor approached. "How is it going back here?" she asked. "Oh fine," I lied, I glanced at my watch, 4:20, how can that be? It must be time to go. Thunk. Something hit me in the back of the leg. I turned around quickly and there it was, a leather basketball. Now, I knew that soon the owner would appear and then I would have to look someone in the face. I couldn't bear that so I stopped and kicked it back into the basketball court behind me. At least I think that is where it came from. I could care less. I just didn't want anyone else looking at me.

What's that? Time to work on our abdominals and then we will call it a day? Thank God. I did a few sit ups and positioned myself for the sprint to the locker room. I hurried inside afraid to

> make eye contact in case someone in the locker room would recognize me as the geek in the back row. I found my locker and sat on the bench. It was then that it hit me . . .

Is this how the young women I had been talking to felt in physical education classes? They did not want others to know they were not skilled; they wanted to hide, at least that is what they had been telling me. They want to have fun. They want someone to teach them so that they could get better. They did not want to swim with the boys because they did not want the boys to see them in such a vulnerable state. That's it . . . I have sat with them and smiled as if I knew just what they were talking about, as if I had been there. The truth is I have not been there, not really.

That day I may have felt a little of what so many young women feel in physical education settings. What a terrible feeling. Do some of them feel like this all the time? Is this why they did not want to participate in physical education programs? How many times had I, as a teacher, approached young women and scared them into lying that everything was going all right just to get rid of me?

I realized then, that I had so much to learn. I sat in front of that locker for a very long time. Finally, I headed to the shower, grateful that the graduate students showered in a different part of the locker room. I needed some privacy.

As I changed and got ready for my night class I wondered if I would go back to the step aerobics class? It would be so easy not to. I mean it was the first class, I knew I could get a refund. But I realized that I had to

go back. You see I knew that I could do that stuff. I just needed a little patience and a little more practice. I knew that I could move. I love to move, and now I just needed to learn a new way to move. I knew I could do it . . .of course I would go back. As I left the locker room I found myself wondering about those who would quit, who could not go back.

This event was for me, the first time that I could remember having any idea what it must feel like not to excel in a physical activity. As a member of numerous local and provincial athletic teams I had participated in a variety of sports and had frequently experienced success. But not on that day; on that day I was one of the worst. I was the one whose body could not do what I wanted it to do. I believe that this type of experience is vital for everyone who works with students in physical education. As the story indicates, it is not simply the inability to do the skill it is all the contextual pressures that make not being able to do the skill that much worse.

I believe that there is much that physical educators can learn by attending to the experiences of their students. However, there has been little research into the experiences of students in physical education classes. Research on teaching physical education is steeped in an empirical analytical tradition. In a comprehensive review of the literature in this area Silverman (1991) determined the presence of three main streams of research. These include: teaching effectiveness, classroom ecology, and cognition and decision making. The teaching effectiveness stream

has received the greatest and most sustained activity over the past two decades. Teaching effectiveness research addresses questions relating to what distinguishes more effective from less effective teachers. "This area of research includes descriptions, process product research, research on the relationships of time and student practice variables to achievement, and comparisons" (Silverman, 1991, p.353).

Systematic observational systems are key in research of this type. Researchers in this paradigm have adapted observational systems designed for the classroom to physical education settings (Darst, Zadrajsek, & Mancini, 1989). These systems claim to be highly objective and are used to study the relationship of the teaching process to pupil learning in natural settings. It is thought that research of this type can differentiate more effective from less effective teaching strategies. The most frequently used observation systems are the Academic Learning Time in Physical Education (ALT-PE) System (Siedentop, Tousignant, & Parker, 1982), and the Cheffers Adaptation of Flanders Interaction Analysis System (CAFIAS) (Cheffers, Mancini, & Martinek, 1980).

Research involving ALT-PE is centered on the belief that how a teacher uses the time in a physical education class is a strong indication of teaching effectiveness. If physical education teachers structure their classes so that students are given many opportunities to practice a motor skill with a high degree of success, then the teachers are thought to be effective. It is believed that "the accumulated time that learners are engaged in motor-appropriate behavior (ALT-PE) is positively correlated

with an increased acquisition of motor skills" (Wood,1994, p.26). Berliner (1977) indicates that pupil opportunity to learn has been identified as a variable that influences effective teaching and pupil learning.

The CAFIAS instrument is used to describe the climate in physical education classes. It does this by coding the verbal and non-verbal interactions between teachers and students. Wood (1994) explains that "CAFIAS is used to describe the direct or indirect influence of the teacher and the type of student responses teachers get as a result of these behaviors" (p.27). Again, this type of research seeks to identify effective teaching behaviors.

Silverman (1991) notes that there has been comparatively little work done in the research streams of cognition and decision making, or classroom ecology. However, the cognition and decision making stream has received a little more attention than the ecology stream. Research in cognition and decision making evolved in an effort to explain why particular teaching behaviors seemed to be effective. This research focuses on planning for teaching (Placek, 1983; Imwold, Rider, Twardy, Oliver, Griffin, & Arsenault, 1984; Twardy & Yerg, 1987) and differences in reflection on teaching practices between novice and experienced teachers (Griffey & Housner, 1991). To investigate teacher planning and thinking the teacher is asked to think out loud. This process is used to "investigate the type and function of cognitive processes that teachers employ while making decisions about lessons units or yearly plans" (Housner,1991, p.38). It is thought that classroom behavior is the manifestation of the

decisions that a teacher makes before, during and after the teaching episode. A key outcome of this research is an increased understanding of the pedagogical, subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge of experienced expert teachers (Griffey & Housner, 1991). It is hoped that such knowledge can enhance the education and development of novice teachers.

Research in the classroom ecology stream frequently makes use of ethnographic or interpretive research methods. The goal of this research is to provide rich descriptions of teaching in a physical education environment. The first study done in classroom ecology in physical education was conducted by Locke (1975). During extensive observations he vividly described the hectic, complex, active physical education environment. Research by Griffin (1983, 1984, 1985a & 1985b) has also involved the ecology of physical education. Her work has focused on equity issues in physical education and how they impact upon the teaching of physical education. She has conducted numerous studies relating to the treatment of young women in physical education classes.

Unfortunately Silverman (1991) notes that the study of classroom ecology has "stagnated". He emphasizes that

> This stream and method can help us understand physical education from the perspectives of teachers and students. Some questions about effectiveness (or when students think the class is effective and they are learning) and attitude can only be investigated from this perspective. (p.359)

The fact that there has been little research conducted outside of the empirical analytic tradition in physical education is of great interest to me. During my years of teaching at both the high school and university levels, I became increasingly interested in questions that cannot be answered using traditional research methodologies. I have learned that objective systematic observation systems cannot provide the answers to the many questions I have about the teaching of physical education.

Significance of Study

This study is significant for two reasons. The first being that there is little research of this type in physical education. Numerous authors (Browne, 1992; Borys, Daniels, Dallaire & Watkinson, 1990; Dahlgren, 1988; Dewar, 1987; Flintoff, 1993; Griffin, 1984, 1989a; Scraton, 1992; Lenskyj, 1991; & Talbot, 1989) have contributed a great deal to our understanding of many of the issues affecting the participation of young women in physical education programs. However, few have involved young women directly in their research. Scraton (1992) for example claims to have obtained "a full and complete picture of girls' physical education through out the Leeds Education Authority" (p.138). However in her study she did not speak with the young women who were participating in the physical education programs she was researching. For example, when discussing reasons against coeducational physical education she states that, "Although these are teachers' perceptions rather than the girls'

responses, the evidence from qualitative research into mixed-sex teaching situations in other secondary subjects supports this concern" (p.90). Although we may be able to learn a great deal from studies in other subject areas, I feel there is a tremendous need to give the young women who participate in physical education classes a chance to tell of their feelings and experiences.

A recent study in New Zealand has provided much needed information about the experiences of young women in physical education classes. In her work, Chalmers (1992) adapted a feminist framework for her research which enabled her to focus on how young women "defined and described their experiences of physical education" (p.4).

In a unique study Dallaire and Rail (1994) recognized the importance of giving a voice to boys and girls in the physical education environment. Using an "empowerment education model" their research focused on the expertise of students, emphasized inclusivity rather than exclusivity and stressed the importance of action and change as a result of the research process. Unfortunately there are few studies of this type.

The second reason that this study is significant is related to an issue that affects all physical educators. When physical education programs become optional in high school young women leave them in great numbers. The 1990-1991 annual report of Alberta Education indicates that half as many girls as boys participate in optional physical education programs in grades eleven and twelve. In Saskatchewan 62% of grade eleven girls and 44% of grade eleven boys choose not to

participate in physical education classes (Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment, 1993).

Why are so many girls choosing not to take physical education? If it was only a case of a "crowded timetable" would we not see a similar number of boys dropping out?

What is the relationship between what is planned in physical education curricula and what is actually being experienced by girls in physical education classes? The recently developed Saskatchewan Education Policy for Physical Education (1992) states that, "The aim of physical education is life long participation. Skill development and participation will foster the development of positive attitudes toward a lifetime commitment to physical activity" (p.3). I wonder, are these aims and objectives being met?

Are girls in physical education classes developing their skills and participating in such a way so that they are learning positive attitudes toward physical activity? It has been my experience that often curricula are planned with these intents but seldom if ever are students consulted to determine if these intents are being met. Wood (1994) suggests that,

> Student experiences of physical education curricula are critical to understanding the historical significance of the individual's participation or non-participation in physical education, and the learnings which may be attributed to these experiences. . . .It is important, therefore, that physical educators become aware of student experiences and perceptions of physical education, in the hope that this knowledge will assist in the development of meaningful curricula. (p.32)

What is the nature of the experience of young women in physical education classes? What do they enjoy? What do they dislike? What impact do teachers have on the physical education experience?

Like Chalmers (1992) and Wood (1994) I believe that if we are going to design and implement programs which will encourage young women to be physically active we must be prepared to listen and act upon the information that they share with us.

> I envisaged that the findings of my research would provide a starting point from which teachers could evaluate their physical education programs and methodology, and so determine whether they are fairly and adequately meeting the needs of their female students. (Chalmers, 1992, p.3)

As physical educators, I believe that we need to ask questions of the type that I am proposing. It is time we recognized that many of us do not know what physical education classes are like for the majority of young women. It is time that we asked and listened so that we may better meet the needs and wishes of the young women in our classes.

Pilot Study

I began to explore questions surrounding the experiences of young women in physical education classes during a pilot study in an Edmonton area high school. I spent two to three mornings a week in this school for approximately three months, observing numerous physical education classes and talking with many young women about their experiences in

physical education. During the time I met with the young women they were all participating in coeducational physical education classes.

This experience was invaluable as it helped me to develop and refine my data collection techniques with respect to "both the content and the procedures to be followed" (Yin, 1984, p.74). When I began I was very nervous, always wondering if I had asked the right question or observed the right thing. However the young women soon put me at ease as they were very willing to share their experiences with me. Many were surprised that someone from a university would be interested in wanting to know what they thought about physical education.

During this pilot study I had the pleasure of working with a fine individual and wonderful physical education teacher named Tamara. Tamara was very interested in the questions I was pursuing and we would often sit together and discuss issues that we felt were crucial to the physical education of young women. During our talks over coffee or in those few moments between classes, Tamara shared with me some of her dissatisfactions with her present situation. She was very aware and intensely concerned about the nature of the experience of young women in coeducational physical education classes. I saw her struggle to voice her feelings and insights and I watched her listen while others dismissed her concerns about young women in physical education classes.

From working with Tamara and her students I was able to see that there was a need for research of this type. I also learned a very valuable lesson. Although Tamara was supportive of the research there were

others in her department who were not. Some believed that the opinions of young women were not worthy of attention, still others believed that the issues that were raised from my work were due to my presence and that "everything was fine until she arrived." Such feelings gave me valuable insights into how threatening research of this type can be to teachers. I learned the importance of working with teachers who shared my concern about the experiences of young women in physical education and valued the opinions of their students. This information helped me a great deal when it came time to choose a school for this project.

Delimitations

My research was delimited to an understanding of the experiences in physical education classes of young women in grades 9 through 12 in one urban high school. This delimitation allowed for the necessary commitment of time and self in order to get to know the young women who chose to participate in the study and to help them feel comfortable with me.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that I had previously taught at the school in which the study was conducted. Although this was five years before the study began there was a chance that I may have taught some

of the sisters or brothers of the young women who participated in the study. This could have negatively or positively affected their desire to participate in the study and or their responses to my questions.

Aspects of Rigor

A study of this type must be concerned with numerous aspects of rigor. Merriam (1988) notes,

> The applied nature of educational inquiry thus makes it imperative that researchers and others be able to trust the results of research and to feel confident that the study is valid and reliable. (p.164)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that "it is incumbent upon the researcher to persuade the audience that the findings of the inquiry are believable and worth paying attention to" (p.290). To ensure the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiry it is suggested that the data collected and analyzed should be verified by attending to the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 289 - 331).

Credibility

The extent to which my analysis was perceived as accurate by the young women involved in the study was used as an indication of credibility. If the young women and other readers of the study could identify with the themes that emerged from the research then the findings

were considered credible. Throughout the collection and analysis of the data the young women were given numerous opportunities to verify the credibility of the themes that I had identified. To facilitate credibility I stayed on the site for almost three months. I closely observed the characteristics and elements most relevant to the study, and I employed triangulation in data collection.

Transferability.

Transferability is the degree to which, and the conditions under which readers are able to transfer the findings to their own circumstances and experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that transferability is the "fittingness, the degree of congruence between sending and receiving" (p.124). It is important to note that "the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make application elsewhere" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.299). Thus, congruence will vary with each reader as the degree of fit will differ from one person to another.

Some authors feel that the generalization of findings is not possible in this type of research, "generalizations are impossible since phenomena are neither time, nor context free" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 238). Others note that "In qualitative case studies the researcher can generalize but it is more likely that the readers will determine whether the research findings fit the situation in which they work" (Eisner, 1991, p.197). It is my hope that readers will find themselves nodding in understanding, and may be able to say "Yes that makes sense. That fits the reality I know. I am willing to

accept that conclusion" (Rutherford, 1990, p.20). Perhaps readers will view their own situations in a different light. To facilitate this I made every effort to provide rich descriptions so that those reading the study could come to an increased understanding of the nature of the experience of the young women in this study and to understand "the meaning events have for those who experience them" (Eisner, 1991, p.35). It is my hope that "Given thick contextual description and vivid portrayals of participants, most readers will have little difficulty recognizing situations that are parallel to their own, or detecting assertions that make no sense in their own experience" (Locke, 1989, p.12).

Dependability.

Dependability refers to the extent to which one's findings could be replicated. Would another individual reach the same or similar conclusions and develop similar themes from the data? Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that "rather then demanding that outsiders get the same results, one wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense, they are consistent and dependable" (p.288). To facilitate this Goertz and LeCompte (1984) suggest that researchers address the following issues: (a) investigators should state their position, the assumptions behind the study, how the participants were chosen, a description of them and a description of the context of the study. (b) triangulation, the incorporation of multiple methods of data collection. (c) the study should be presented in as much detail as possible. How was the

data collected, how were categories derived and how were decisions made throughout the study (p. 216). Each of these issues were addressed in this study and are discussed in the methodology section of this paper.

Confirmability.

The criterion for establishing confirmability is the extent to which the characteristics of the data in the study are confirmable with other sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300). To help achieve confirmability I employed multiple methods of data collection, this is known as triangulation. In addition, I asked a colleague to act as critical friend. I sent her copies of the transcripts and drafts of themes and asked her to review them to determine if the themes I was constructing were supported by the information I had obtained. I also met with her during the study to discuss my insights and questions. Guba and Lincoln, (1981) suggest that a colleague independently examine the product -- data findings and interpretations -- and attests that it is supported by data and is internally coherent.

Reflexive Journal

A reflexive journal was kept in a section of my personal journal. This type of journal can have broad ranging applications to all aspects of rigor. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that a reflexive journal can provide a base for the judgment calls a researcher must make during the course of

the study. A methodological log in which methodological decisions and accompanying rationales were noted was also a part of the reflexive journal.

Ethical Considerations

In a qualitative case study, "ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge at two points: during the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings" (Merriam, 1988, p.179). Due to the emergent nature of a case study design it is often difficult to predict what ethical dilemmas may occur. After considering the possible effects of both my presence in the school and the participation of the young women, I did everything I could to ensure that my work and my behavior was ethical (Eisner, 1991).

Prior to the initiation of the study a completed research proposal was submitted to the Ethics Committee, Department of Secondary Education and the Local Board of Education for their approval. One month before the study was scheduled to begin I traveled to the school to explain the purpose and nature of the study. This was done during regularly scheduled physical education classes. I allowed time for questions and remained at the end of the class in case any of the young women wished to discuss the study with me privately.

The written consent of both the participants and their parents was obtained prior to initiating the study. If a young woman was interested in participating in the study I instructed her to pick up an information letter

and consent form from me or her physical education teacher. The interested participant was asked to review both of these documents with her parent or guardian and return them to the physical education teacher as soon as possible. I made it clear that participation in the study was voluntary and that if anyone chose to do so, they could withdraw from the study at any time. In addition both the physical education teacher and I assured the young women that their participation in the study would not affect their physical education grade in any way.

Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained at all times. This was crucial in a study of this type as my participants could be easily victimized by those in power positions (teachers, parents and other adults) if any of their comments were released. Prior to my discussions with each group of young women I explained that everything that we discussed would be confidential and that all information collected during the research through observation or interview would be kept in a safe place. All participants were informed that their names would not be used, nor would the name of the school be included in any printed or published reports that were written as a result of the study. Thus, pseudonyms are used throughout the writing of this paper.

I also explained to them that I would be the only person who listened to the audio tapes. I assured them that if they ever wanted to turn the tape recorder off or if they ever wished to delete any of their pre-recorded comments I would be happy to accommodate such requests. Eisner (1991) discusses the importance of this when he states that,

> . . .many people seldom encounter others who are willing to listen carefully to what they have to say over long periods of time. In this sense, qualitative researchers who convey to students or teachers a sincere interest in their opinions and ideas are likely to elicit a great deal of information that individuals may not even know they are providing.
>
> On the one hand to be able to create the psychological comfort that makes it possible for people to reveal what they think, feel and fear is the mark of a good field researcher. On the other hand, the people interviewed might have some regrets later about what they have said. (p.218)

Although I did not have an instance in which any of the young women asked for portions of the tape to be deleted I did have one situation when a group decided it would be better if the tape machine was turned off. At the time we were discussing some very personal issues and I was very happy to accommodate this request.

Methods and Procedures

"Qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities -- the capacity to learn from others" (Patton, 1990, p.7). The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of adolescent girls in physical education classes. To gain this insight a qualitative study was undertaken as " . . .qualitative researchers are interested in matters of motive and in the quality of experience undergone by those in the situation studied" (Eisner, 1991, p.35).

A qualitative study is usually "non manipulative" (Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1988) because situations are studied intact. "Qualitative

researchers observe, interview, record, describe, interpret and appraise settings as they are" (Eisner, 1991, p. 33). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this approach as naturalistic. Naturalistic inquiry focuses on meaning in context and makes good use of human qualities such as interviewing, observing and analyzing (Merriam, 1988).

The selection of a research design should be determined by how the problem is shaped, the questions it raises and the end product desired (Merriam, 1988). Since I was interested in descriptions and explanations, and I wished to examine a phenomena the way it was, a case study approach was used. A case study is often the best methodology for addressing research problems in which understanding is sought to improve practice: "...research focused on the discovery, insight and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (Merriam, 1988, p.3). As a teacher educator I sought to better understand the experiences of young women in physical education classes. In a qualitative approach to research the paramount objective is to understand the meaning of the experience,

> . . . to understand the nature of the setting -- what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting--and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. (Patton, 1985, cited in Merriam, 1988, p.17)

It was my hope that this understanding would help me to better prepare university students to make available programs which meet the needs and interests of the young women in their classes.

This study meets the four characteristics of a qualitative study as outlined by Merriam (1988): (a) the study is particularistic in that it focused on the experiences of selected young women in physical education classes; (b) it is descriptive as the end product of the study is a "thick" description of the experiences of young women in high school physical education classes; (c) the study is heuristic because it illuminates the reader's understanding of the experiences of young women in physical education settings; and (d) it is inductive because concepts and understandings emerge through an examination of the data which is grounded in the experiences of young women in physical education classes (pp. 11-13).

According to Patton (1990), a case study may involve a person, an event, a program, an organization, or a time period. The focus of attention is on the case. Within the case the attention is further focused on the "bounded system" (Patton, 1990, Stake, 1988; & Merriam, 1988).

> The case is something deemed worthy of close watch. It has character, it has a totality, it has boundaries. It is not something we want to represent by a score. It is not something we want to represent only by an array of scores. It is a complex, dynamic system. We want to understand its complexity. . . . bounded system indicates that we are going to try to figure out what complex things go on inside that system. The case study tells a story about a bounded system. (Stake, 1988, p. 256)

The boundaries of the case that I studied included selected groups of young women from one urban high school that I have called Murdoch High School. The young women who volunteered for the study came from seven different physical education classes. These classes included at least one from each of the grades nine through twelve. In addition, selected girls who were in grade eleven and twelve and had chosen not to take physical education were also included in the study. Another boundary is the time on site. I studied the case for two and one half months, spending almost the entire day at the school.

Data Collection

Case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection, "any and all methods of gathering data from testing to interviewing can be used, although certain techniques are used more than others" (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). Patton (1990) explains that "multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single method of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective on the program" (p.244). Often the methods that are combined and used are dissimilar. For example, interviews, observations, document analysis, and journals were all used in this study. This combining of such different methods is known as triangulation, "the technique is one of trying to arrive at the same meaning by at least three independent approaches" (Stake, 1988, p.263). Often the flaws of one method are the strengths of another.

By combining methods the best of each method can be achieved and the nature of the case under study can be explored in greater depth.

It is important to note that in a qualitative case study "the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data" (Merriam, 1988, p.37). When the study began the idea that I was the instrument was very frightening. I often found myself wondering if I was observing the right thing, or asking the right questions. I was so worried that I was going to miss something that would be important in the study. However as the study progressed I found myself becoming more comfortable with myself as the instrument. I was relieved to learn that with practice, I was able to "engage the situation and make sense of it" (Eisner, 1991, p.34).

Gaining Entry

Prior to beginning this research I obtained permission to conduct the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that the "key to access are almost always in the hands of multiple gatekeepers, both formal and informal" (p.253). As I was recently employed by the system and had taught with the teacher at the school in which I wished to do the study I was able to gain a "low-profile entry" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.82). Prior to meeting with the formal gatekeepers, the central office superintendent and school principal, I met with the informal gatekeeper, the teacher whose students would be involved in the study. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) recommend this approach as they note that the principal "will not go to bat

for you unless he or she knows that the teachers involved are supportive" (p.81).

I contacted the teacher by phone to explain the study and I then sent her a copy of my proposal. She was very interested in the research and shortly after our initial conversation indicated to me that she would enjoy being involved in the project. She also discussed the study with her students and told me that she was confident that some of the students in her classes would be willing to participate in the study. The teacher then communicated her desire to be involved in the research to her principal. Shortly after, I set up a meeting with the Deputy Director for Educational Services to formally request permission to conduct the study at the school. He gave me verbal approval and asked me to complete a form outlining the research. He then asked me to meet with the principal to explain the study to him and indicate what my role would be in the school.

During this meeting the principal asked me about issues of parent consent and confidentiality. I gave him a copy of the student and parent consent form and assured him that participation in the study would be voluntary and that the students could withdraw at any time. He was very supportive of the study and asked what he could to facilitate the research. I requested that in his weekly memo he communicate to the staff my purpose in the school. He was pleased to do this. During my time at the school the staff members were very accommodating. The female teachers in particular were very interested in the study. They frequently discussed their physical education experiences with me and often

expressed support of researching the experiences of young women. I began to share some of the literature I had read with them and a few of us met informally to discuss some of the problems facing young women in schools.

Observation

"To understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in, and observation of, the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method" (Patton, 1990, p.25). The value of observing, listening, and reflecting as a means of gaining greater understanding of the case under study cannot be understated. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) maintain that, observing gives the researcher a first hand account of what is going on in the case under study. Observation becomes a research tool when it (a) serves a formulated research purpose, (b) is planned deliberately, (c) is recorded systematically, and (d) is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability (Merriam, 1988, p. 88).

Several factors can determine what to observe. The most important consideration is the purpose of the research, or the questions that are under investigation. As I was interested in the experience of girls in physical education classes I observed as many of their classes as I could. As numerous authors note, one cannot observe everything, thus it helps to have a checklist of elements likely to be present in an observation (Goertz & LeCompte, 1984; Patton, 1980; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). These elements include: the setting, what is the physical environment like?; the

participants, who is in the scene?; activities and interactions, what is going on, how do people interact with each other?; frequency and duration, when did the situation begin? and subtle factors, such as informal and unplanned activities, dress and physical space. This checklist helped me a great deal as like to many novice researchers I initially tried to describe virtually everything I was seeing (Eisner, 1991). To avoid this I wrote this checklist in my journal and frequently referred to it. All of my observations were recorded in my journal.

I also recorded my feelings, reactions, reflections and interpretations of the observations. At the beginning of the study I found myself frequently commenting on the behaviors of the teacher. I think I did this because of my experience as a teacher and teacher educator. I often had to remind myself to observe the students as well as the teacher. To alleviate this I began to focus on the students in the study often noting questions or comments that I wanted to discuss during our conversations.

The majority of my observations were done during my first three weeks at the school. After this time I found that due to my conversations with the young women I was not able to observe as much as I had initially planned. I tried to alternate my observations with my discussions with the young women involved in the study. Due to the large number of young women who wished to be involved in the study this was not always possible.

During the study I found that my role was one of researcher - participant, "one who participates in a social situation but is personally only

partially involved, so that he (she) can function as a researcher" (Gans, 1982, p.54). I participated to the extent that my involvement helped me to get to know the girls in the study and increased my understanding of their experiences in physical education.

Prior to the commencement of the study I was concerned that due to my many years of teaching high school physical education I would try to assume the role of teacher rather than observer. I quickly learned that this concern was unfounded. I soon became so focused on my research that I did not want to assume the role of teacher. In addition the students rarely viewed me as a teacher. During my time at the school I was called many things, "that lady, the woman from the university, the student teacher" but never the teacher.

Although I was given a desk in the physical education office, I rarely used it. In between classes I made a point of sitting in the gym so that I could observe and talk to students informally. I found that this helped the students become more comfortable with me. I tried to have some equipment ready so that I could shoot baskets or hit badminton birds with some of the young women prior to the class beginning. During the lunch hour I tried to avoid eating in the staff room as I felt that this would help the students understand that in this situation I was not the teacher. I found that lunch hours gave me another opportunity to observe and talk with students. By assuming the role of participant observer rather than teacher I was able to meet my goal which was "to combine participation and

observation so as to become capable of understanding the program as an insider while describing the program for outsiders" (Patton, 1980, p.128).

Journals

All of the young women in the study were given an opportunity to keep a personal journal of their experiences in physical education classes. I explained to them that these entries could take the form of critical incidents or important occurrences during physical education classes and/or during episodes of physical activity that may have occurred outside of regularly scheduled physical education classes. They were also encouraged to record their feelings and thoughts about any of the issues raised during the interviews or any issues that they felt were important to them during the study.

Only a few young women were able to keep such a journal. The others would often forget them or tell me they didn't write in them but they had thought about what we had talked about, and would rather talk about things then write them down. At first I was disappointed in this and tried to encourage them to write in their journals, but my efforts were to no avail. I decided to let the young women choose if they wanted to keep a journal or not. The few who did, brought their journals to our sessions and often read directly from them. For example, some of the journal writers cut articles pertaining to fashion models and the need to be thin out of newspapers and magazines. They then wrote comments about how such

articles made them feel. This strategy worked very well as it provided us with concrete examples of many of the issues that we were discussing.

During the study I kept a reflexive journal. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that a reflexive journal is "a kind of diary in which the investigator on a daily basis, or as needed, records a variety of information about self (hence the term reflexive) and method" (p.327). I found my journal invaluable as it offered me an opportunity to keep a record of my experiences and observations during the study. I frequently consulted it both during and after the study. Following the guidelines suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985) my journal had three sections.

The first section contained the "daily schedule and logistics of the study" (p.327). As I was working with almost fifty young women coming from many different classes and grades it was imperative that I keep a record of dates and locations of all observations, and meetings. I also used this section to note such things as who had borrowed cameras or magazine articles.

The second section was my personal diary. I used this section to record my feelings and concerns about the study, to reflect on how the study was progressing and to speculate on my insights (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.327). These entries were often in the form of questions to myself. "Should I continue with that topic; What does the literature say about this issue; That worked well, perhaps I should do that again, etc." The most frequent comment which arose from my observations was, "I will have to ask the young women about that".

I often reviewed these questions and comments at the end of the day or the end of the week and tried to establish long and short term goals for myself and the study. I also used my personal journal to record topics that had been discussed with certain groups of young women and topics for future discussions. Often after speaking with a group I would get an idea, question or topic that I wanted to explore with them. These ideas would come to me at all times of the day, while driving home from the school, during my morning runs, watching TV or movies, and during conversations with others about the study. Patton (1990) suggests that the nature and the intensity of the observer's own feelings, reactions, reflections and interpretations should be recorded at the time they are experienced. To facilitate this I kept my journal with me at all times. I was surprised how immersed I became in my research, I felt that I was always doing my study. By recording my thoughts and feelings in my journal I was not only able to keep a valuable record of my research, I was also able to spare my friends and family from nonstop talk about the study!

The third section of my journal contained a methodological log. In this section I recorded all "methodological decisions and accompanying rationale" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.327). This section was very important as "investigators who engage in field work will do things that make sense to them, given the problem in which they are interested, the aptitude they possess and the context in which they work" (Eisner, 1991, p.169). I used this section to record decisions that I was making about the study that made sense to me. Examples of such entries included descriptions of an

initial visit at a department meeting to discuss the study, conditions of entry and how they affected the study, decisions about which young women to speak to and how to group them, the meeting and organization of students not currently taking physical education, and decisions regarding the degree of my involvement in specific classes.

Photography

The opportunity to use cameras was provided for all young women in the study. It was my hope that this would offer them another way of communicating their experiences in physical education. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) note that cameras can be used to gain insight into how research participants see their world. The young women in this study were asked to take pictures of images that reflected their experiences in physical education and physical activity in general. The cameras were available throughout the study.

The young women enjoyed using the cameras a great deal. They were thrilled that they could take pictures of things that were important to them and that I would pay for the developing! I always ordered double prints so that they could keep their pictures and I could have a copy for my records. Once the film was developed I gave the pictures to the young women and asked them to share with the group the significance that a picture or pictures had for them. I also asked them to choose four or five of their pictures and provide me with written comments about what each picture meant to them. I encouraged them to think of this as writing or

telling a story about their picture. The pictures and the stories es that surrounded them helped me to understand the young women's feelings and experiences in physical education. This also helped me to get to know them a little better. In addition, the pictures and stories provided excellent springboards for group discussions. I sensed that sometimes it was easier to look at a picture and talk about the feelings it evoked than to try to recall specific situations. For the girls the cameras were a definite highlight of their participation in the study.

I also took pictures to capture my feelings and experiences at Murdoch High School. I often found myself observing a situation and after trying to describe it completely in my journal I realized that a picture would better describe and illustrate what I was seeing and feeling. Eisner (1991) discusses this as he states that "Photographs and films can say things that not only would require pages and pages of words to describe, but in the end would not be adequately described with words" (p.187). I often shared my pictures with the young women as they seemed genuinely interested in the stories behind my pictures. This also gave me an opportunity to talk about the reasons I had taken the picture and in some cases ask the young women if they thought that my perceptions were accurate.

Another powerful benefit of the cameras was first brought to my attention during their use in my pilot study. The teacher with whom I worked commented about how excited the young women were to see pictures of themselves being active in physical education classes. In her

words she felt that the photographs "championed their participation". She explained that all too often the only pictures available in a gymnasium were of elite athletes and too often they were only of males in action. I sensed that this phenomena was also present in this study. The girls were excited not only about the opportunity to take the pictures but they were also thrilled to see themselves and their friends in "action".

Interviews

> We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. . . . We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world--we have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (Patton, 1980, p.196)

I have chosen to begin this section on interviewing with the above quote as I feel that it captures my feelings about what happened during my research. I interviewed the young women in this study to try to gain a better understanding of what physical education was like for them. In Patton's (1980) words I tried to enter into their perspective. I feel that talking with and listening to the young women allowed me to do this.

Most of the young women who volunteered to participate in the study were interviewed in small groups of three or four. Some of the young women volunteered as a group and asked that I speak with them together. In other situations the physical education teacher, Mrs. Von, reviewed the list of young women who had volunteered and based on her

experience with them placed them into groups in which she thought they would be comfortable. I was very concerned that the young women be in groups in which they felt comfortable and safe as I felt that in such a situation it would be easier for them to share their experiences. These organizational strategies worked very well. Although I gave the young women the option of changing groups, none were interested in doing so. They quickly formed a bond with the others in their group and would often go and find them so that we could all be together when our discussions began.

In some situations I interviewed the young women individually. This did not happen often, but was given as an option to all the young women. The few who did choose this option were older and were often not available during classes so we met after school or during the lunch hour. A few of the young women requested time to speak with me about issues not directly related to the study. These discussions often dealt with choices for post secondary education, problems in their homes or troubles with their friends.

Semi-structured interviews were used to determine the nature of the young womens' experience in physical education. The preliminary interviews were initiated and guided by questions that I had prepared. However it did not take long before my questions were used only as a guide. If the girls wished to discuss issues that I had not previously considered or if they wanted to dwell on certain issues I was happy to let them do so. It is interesting to note that Oakley (1980) feels that

interviewing is inappropriate, particularly in research involving women. She states that interviews are one way processes in which "the interview elicits and receives but does not give information" (p.30). I did not have this experience. If the young women asked me my opinion I freely gave it. However, during the research I sensed that the girls expected and wanted me to set the agenda for our discussions. They knew however, that they were not bound by my agenda. If they wanted to discuss other issues I would be more than willing to let our discussions go in a direction that they had chosen. Although this happened with some regularity, they would just as often turn to me and ask me what my next question was. I do not feel that this hindered the research in any way. In fact I think that this format made the young women feel more comfortable as they could respond to the questions that I had prepared or we could talk about issues that they wanted to bring up.

With the permission of the young women, all of the interviews were audio taped. Initially I was concerned that they may feel uncomfortable with the tape recorder, but this was not the case. Some groups made no mention of the machine at all, for them it was almost as though it was not there. Others would often ask if the machine was on, as they wanted to make sure that their comments were being heard and recorded. At the completion of each interview and prior to our next meeting I reviewed the tape and tried to paraphrase our discussions. To facilitate this I used a form of a method developed by Giorgi (1985) as cited in Connolly (1990). I listened to the tape to try to get a sense of the whole. Next meaning

units were be established, these involved the same word or context that occurs again and again. These meaning units were transformed into phrases that the girls could understand. I shared these phrases with the girls to determine if I had accurately described what we had discussed (Connolly, 1990, p. 58).

I began each session with a summary of our last discussion. In doing this I attempted to return the data to the young women in an effort to ensure that I had understood them correctly. I was surprised to learn that this often bored them and they frequently told me that I didn't have to do this. However, I continued this practice but instead of repeating the entire session I chose to focus on the areas that I felt that I may have misunderstood or needed clarification. We often used this summary as a starting point for our discussions.

Document Analysis

Documentary data are particularly good for qualitative case studies because they "can ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated" (Merriam, 1988, p.109). Data obtained from observations, and interviews was supplemented with information obtained through a review and analysis of documents. These documents included the provincial physical education curriculum, school board statements, the physical education department's goals, objectives and yearly plans. Related documents such as class handouts and posted information were also examined.

Ending Data Collection

When this study began I often wondered if I would be able to obtain enough information. Would I have time to speak to everyone and observe everything? Would I review all the necessary documents? Would I leave with many unanswered questions? Lincoln and Guba (1985) caution that data collection can extend almost indefinitely. They offer the following theoretical guidelines for ending the data collection phase of a study: (a) exhaustion of sources, (b) saturation of categories, (c) emergence of regularities and (d) over extension (p.350). I was relieved to find that near the end of my time at the school I was aware that many of the above guidelines applied to my work. I had spoken at length to all those who had wanted to be involved in the study. During our later meetings I became aware that little new information was being uncovered. From the beginning to the end of the study I had noted possible themes and many of these were being repeated with regularity. It also became evident that any new information that was uncovered near the end of the study was often not related to any of the questions that I had decided to research. I enjoyed being with the young women but near the end of the study, they and I sensed that our time together was coming to a natural close.

Eisner (1991) maintains that researchers must "leave the site clean" (p.175). He notes the importance of researchers keeping promises, providing feedback, clearing up their own paperwork, tying up loose ends and expressing thanks. I was able to do this by ensuring that all of the

photographs the girls had requested were distributed to them, I cleaned out my desk, and any equipment I had borrowed was returned. Letters of appreciation were sent to Mrs. Von and the physical education department, the school principal, and the Deputy Director of the Board of Education. To express my appreciation, I took all the young women who had been involved in the study to the Dairy Queen during our last meeting together. This was enjoyed by all!

Once the decision had been made to end the study I began to organize my data so that analysis could begin. Merriam (1988) suggests that "All the information one has about the case should be brought together" (p.126). Patton (1980) refers to this as the case record, "The case record includes all the major information that will be used in doing the case analysis and the case study" (p.313). The information that I gathered together included photographs, student journals, personal journals and memos, magazine pictures and articles, physical education documents, and audio tapes. The data was initially organized by group and grade of the young women with whom I observed and spoke.

Prior to large scale data analysis, all of the audio tapes were transcribed. I decided to transcribe all of the tapes myself and although this was an incredibly labor intensive procedure, taking two months to complete, I found this to be a very valuable endeavor. As I was the one who had done all of the interviewing, I found that as I listened and typed I was able to recall and note the mood in the room, the reasons for silence, the significance of laughter and my feelings during the interviews. I also

inserted literature that I felt might apply to the discussions and frequently noted repeated phrases and themes. I feel that this interactive process greatly aided my analysis of the data that I had collected.

Data Analysis

Numerous authors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Eisner, 1991; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; & Merriam, 1988) stress the importance of interpreting and analyzing data during the study. Data analysis should be an ongoing process: "simultaneous analysis and data collection allows the researcher to direct the data phase more productively, as well as develop a data base that is both relevant and manageable" (Merriam, 1988, p. 145).

Throughout the study I attempted to make sense out of the information I was collecting. This helped me to identify a direction for the study. At the end of each day I reviewed my notes and audio tapes and began to record possible themes and issues requiring further observation or clarification. I also attempted to review some of the literature related to young women in physical education while I was still in the process of data collection. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest that the researcher, "Begin exploring the literature while you are in the field. This will enhance analysis and help to identify crucial issues. How do past findings bear on your study?" (p.161). As so little of the literature contained the voices of young women I used this as an opportunity to "validate" the opinions of the authors. This ongoing analysis and review of data permitted me to "try

out" my ideas and themes with the young women (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). As I was attempting to make sense of their experiences in physical education I found this process both valuable and essential to a study of this type.

The formal data analysis began when all the data had been collected. The goal of data analysis is "to come up with reasonable conclusions and generalizations based on a preponderance of the data" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p.139). This worthy goal is not without it's challenges! "Analysis brings moments of terror that there's nothing there and times of exhilaration from the clarity of discovering the ultimate truth. In between are long periods of hard work, deep thinking, and weight lifting volumes of material" (Patton, 1990, p.371).

During the data analysis for this study I experienced many moments of terror. I am not certain if I ever discovered the ultimate truth but there were a few moments of clarity. Initially I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data that I had collected: numerous curriculum documents, five hundred pages of transcripts, one hundred photographs, three notebooks containing my personal journals, and numerous stories and journals collected from the young women. After the data had been organized, it was analyzed using the following procedures.

Scanning/noting

As previously noted, while in the process of data collection I constantly reviewed the data. This review helped me prepare for the next

interview, the next observation, and helped to determine a direction for the study.

At the end of data collection I read the data through several times from beginning to end (Merriam, 1988). As I read, I made notes in the margins which helped to identify recurring ideas, categories and themes.

> The notes taken while scanning constitute the beginning stages of organizing, abstracting, integrating, and synthesizing, which ultimately permit investigators to tell others what they have seen. The notes are developed into a primitive outline or system of classifications into which data are sorted initially. The outline begins with a search for regularities--things that happen frequently with groups of people. Patterns and regularities then are transformed into categories into which subsequent items are sorted. These categories or patterns are discovered from the data. (Goertz & Lecompte, 1984, p. 191)

Developing categories

Merriam (1988) suggests that developing categories is largely an intuitive process. However the process is systematic and guided by the study's purpose and the investigator's knowledge and orientation. The determination of categories often begins with a search for regularities, the ideas, experiences and thoughts that are frequently shared by groups of people. The categories must be internally homogeneous, all items in a single category are similar and they should also be heterogeneous, the differences among the categories should be bold and clear (Merriam, 1988).

Four guidelines for developing categories have been suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1981): (a) the number of people who mention something or the frequency with which something arises in the data, (b) the categories determined by the audience as important, (c) unique categories, and (d) categories which highlight areas of inquiry not otherwise recognized (p.95).

Using this criteria I was able to identify the following set of preliminary categories: competition, fun, break in the day, physical education teachers, boys in physical education, girls in physical education, the body/the look, activities in physical education classes, uniforms, experiences in elementary physical education classes, teachers of other subjects, fitness activities, the future and the influence of parents and family.

Unitising

After generating preliminary categories I read through the data collected and assigned categories to specific units of information. A unit can come from any type of data collected, it can be a phrase, a sentence or a pattern of behavior. To be identified as a unit Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggest that two criteria be met. First the unit should be heuristic in that it should provide information that is relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the information provided. In addition, the unit should also be the smallest piece of information that can be

interpreted with only a broad understanding of the context of the study (p. 345).

Developing Themes

To facilitate the development of themes, the data was organized using manila file folders. This method, suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Merriam (1988) requires the researcher to "take scissors and cut up the notes so that the units of data could be placed in manila folders that have been labeled with a code (category)" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.179). Prior to beginning this process I made photocopies of my journal notes and all transcripts so that the units could be traced back to the original text. It is also important to note that once a unit of information was identified it was given a code which identified the grade of the group being observed or interviewed, the number of the interview or observation, and the original page number of the text. For example, if a unit of information came from the second interview with a group of grade nine girls found on page six of the original transcript, it would be coded as: (9-2-6). This system helped me to locate each "cut up piece of information" in the master copy (Merriam, 1988, p.138).

Once this process was completed I read through the contents of each folder to further organize the information and to determine if the contents matched the category assigned to them. This also gave me an opportunity to compare the information in each folder to determine if relationships existed between any of the folders. Merriam (1988) refers to

this as "clustering the data" (p.149). She suggests grouping together categories that seem similar. "Are two units of information alike in any way . . .can they be grouped together, or does it make more sense to separate them?" (p.149). Reviewing and clustering afforded me an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the data and also allowed me to significantly reduce the number of categories.

I then began to move from the categories to the identification of themes. The categories helped to "distill the major themes that would provide a structure to the writing" (Eisner, 1991, p.190). A theme is often thought of as a concept or story that emerges from the data. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest that when formulating themes it is beneficial to "pencil out different ways of putting things together, drawing up lists and diagrams" (p.179). I did this by writing the categories and pertinent descriptor words and quotes on a large piece of poster paper. Next I looked for relationships between the remaining categories. I was looking for big ideas, words or phrases that captured the "meaning" of the categories. Eisner (1991) explains that "categories help to distill the major themes that would provide a structure to the writing. Within these structures, authors select material which they then use to illuminate the themes that they have formulated " (pp. 189-190). This is a process that cannot be rushed and I was never really sure if I had chosen the right themes. I realized however, that I had to choose the themes that, based on my experience with the data, made sense to me. The determination of themes continued through the writing process. I was careful not to make

any firm decisions. This allowed me to be open to relationships and topics that may have not been immediately evident.

Writing the Themes

The themes provide "the conceptual hubs around which the story can be told" (Eisner, 1991, p.190). The telling of the story was an enjoyable but difficult experience. Enjoyable, as it permitted me the opportunity to review and in some cases re-live some of my experiences with the young women. Difficult, in that I felt a tremendous responsibility to accurately describe their feelings and experiences. I was comforted however by Eisner's (1991) words as he explains " . . .we seek not a mirror but a tale, a revelation or a portrayal of what we think is important about what we have come to know" (p.191).

I began with the theme which I felt that I knew the most about, the one with which I felt the most comfortable. This was determined by the feelings that it evoked and my reading of related literature. I then read all of the data related to the theme and looked for sub-themes or topics around which I could organize the information. This was a long process but one which I would recommend as it allowed me to view a large amount of information in component parts; making a huge task seem a little more manageable. During this process I also highlighted key phrases and statements which I felt truly captured the contents of the sub-theme.

My goal in writing this case study was to "take the reader into the case situation, a person's life, or a program's life" (Patton, 1980, p.304).

To do this I had to learn to balance concrete description with analysis and interpretation (Merriam, 1988). Whenever possible I tried to allow the young women's words to introduce and illuminate the key points of the study. I found that this permitted me to organize and write this case study directly around the experiences of the young women. From their words I have attempted to draw insights and interpretations into the experiences of young women in physical education.

CHAPTER TWO

BEHIND THE SMILES

Introduction

When this study began I was naive in my belief that I would get together with a group of young women and talk about physical education and only physical education. I'm not sure why I thought this. It may have been because in my many years of teaching high school the only young women I really got to know and became close to, were the young women I coached on teams.

While traveling across the Saskatchewan prairie, eating pizza in hotel rooms and sitting on bleachers in gymnasiums we would often talk about school, parents, friends, boyfriends and future plans. It seemed that once we were in the van and a few blocks from the school, the walls would come down and we enjoyed much more than a teacher-student relationship. I enjoyed listening to their stories and whenever possible I would try to help them sort things out. These discussions served as a constant reminder to me that these talented young athletes were also young women with hopes and dreams, fears and disappointments, and I had the privilege of sharing a part of their lives with them.

In the years since I last taught high school I have had few opportunities such as these to share in the lives of teenagers. I think that

one of my biggest frustrations with teaching at a university was that I now talk about high school students; seldom with them. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why I chose to do research such as this.

Few of the young women who volunteered for this study were members of school teams. They were instead those average kids in your class who tried hard, attended regularly and didn't cause any "problems". In my ten years of teaching I probably taught hundreds of young women like these; but I didn't really know many of them. I seldom, if ever, sat and talked with them about what was going on in their lives. I anticipated that it would take a couple of weeks for the young women in this study to feel comfortable with me. This, however, was not the case. The grade or the circumstance didn't seem to matter, these young women were eager to share their lives with me. Kostash (1987) in her work with teenage girls recalls that "nobody had ever asked, so the stories came tumbling out" (p.9). I soon realized that these young women had experienced few times in their lives when someone, in this case an adult, would sit down, listen to them, and value what they had to say. As one young woman put it, "I mean this is a once in a lifetime opportunity; someone wants to listen to us and not tell us what to do."

I can still see them, smiling and running across the gym to ask if we were "talking" today. And when I said yes, as I almost always did, they would run to get the others. "We'll find everyone, and come right back" they would call as they hurried into the hall or the locker room, flashing me yet another smile. I can still see those smiles. Some of them I even

captured on film. Smiling faces sitting in a circle around the microphone, standing with their friends, posing in front of a boyfriend's car. You know, the pictures you would expect to see of teenage girls. However, like most pictures there is a story behind the picture, a story behind the smile.

These stories emerged when we were together in the seclusion of a portable just outside the gym. This was a perfect place for us as the room was free of desks and the floor was covered with soft mats. Together we would sit on the floor and with the soft whir of the tape recorder in the background we talked. We were seldom interrupted, I don't think many people knew we were there. It was almost as though we had escaped and were hiding out, together. I often thought of the portable as our safe place. When we entered, it was as though we were stepping across a boundary into a different place. The importance of such an environment was emphasized by those involved in A Capella, the Canadian Teachers' Federation's (1990) study of adolescent women,

> Given an environment that is "safe" (a small group discussion led by a trusted adult and where confidentiality is assured), respectful and focused on them, the young women approached the questions in an open and candid manner. The girls were extremely articulate about their concerns, thoughts and feelings. (p.6)

From our discussions I not only learned about their feelings and experiences in physical education I also learned a great deal about what it was like to be a teenage girl. I now realize that although I had spent ten years teaching young women in high school physical education classes, for the most part that is exactly what I did, teach them physical education.

I did not, or perhaps I could not, understand what their lives were like. This study gave me an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the highs and the lows, the feelings, thoughts and experiences that made up the world behind the smiles.

I Just Want A Break

> "I just want a break from everything. That is why I took phys-ed I knew it could help me stop all the stress" (11-3-17).

Recent research indicates that young Canadian women experience a higher incidence of stress related disorders than do their male counterparts (King & Coles,1992). Girls Incorporated (1993) report that, "The collection of actual and potential changes during adolescence -- physical changes, the transition from middle to junior high school, more responsibility, changing adult reactions, high expectations for coping with complex pressures" (p.2), seem to affect girls more than boys. A young woman involved in the A Capella study explains, "sometimes I don't think I can make it through the day with all my school work, my social life, and all the other things people expect me to do" (Canadian Teachers' Federation,1990).

The young women in this study often spoke of troubling relationships with parents and friends, anxiety about school and their future plans, and an intense concern about their appearance. "I think that

as a teenager you have a lot of stress, you are going through a lot with your family and school and boyfriends and then you are always worrying about the way you look" (9-5-13).

Relationships with parents were the cause of stress for many young women. Misunderstood and not listened to, they often expressed the feeling that their parents did not know how difficult it was to be a teenager.

Marci: Well they say that they know what it is like to be our age but they really don't. My mom doesn't even know who I am. A lot of times they are so preoccupied with bills and work and stuff that they don't even take time to know you, on your level.

Kelly: My dad and me we got into a fight and last night and he told me that life was so easy for me. He said that I have it so easy, I just go to school and watch TV. He has no idea, it is so much harder than that, they don't know anything. (10-2-16)

The attitudes of their parents troubled many of the young women. I often felt that they wanted to talk to their parents, to tell them about the things that were bothering them, but they did not think that their parents would listen or understand.

Some of the young women shared experiences of living in violent homes. When telling these stories they would often conclude by stating that they were not going to have a life like their mothers.

He (stepfather) comes into the house and he will slam the door or open a drawer, find something and then he will throw the drawer across the room. I look at my mom, and I want her to do

> something about it, but she just sits there. Other things happen too, but I don't tell my mom, I am too afraid. (9-2-14)

With high unemployment and strict quotas placed on entrance to post secondary institutions it was not surprising to learn that many of the young women were very concerned about their futures. This concern was more prevalent in grades 11 and 12 but was also expressed by girls in grades 9 and 10, as they were at the point of trying to determine what courses they would need to take in the senior grades. When I asked April, a grade 11 girl if the future excited her, she said that she had never really thought about it that way. She explained that whenever she thought about the future she got a sick feeling in her stomach.

> Like grade 11 went by so fast and I am scared that grade 12 is going to go by even faster and I just don't know if I want to go to university or even if I will get in, and then there are exams and I have so many tests at once and I am always fighting with my parents and my friends and it just all really gets to me. Yesterday in third period all I did was cry I was so upset. (11-3-15)

In this sea of distress, many of the young women looked to their physical education class as a break; a chance to relax and "forget about everything". I quickly realized that when the doors to the gym opened these young women entered a world very different from the one left at home or in school hallways and classes. A young woman in the pilot study stressed the importance of physical education providing an opportunity for her to relax, "I think phys-ed should be for relaxing. It

should be a time when you can get away from everything. I mean a place where you can go and feel good about yourself."

The most important difference for the girls in grades 9 and 10 was that there were no boys in the class. "It is so nice to have a break, like one period just to be with the girls and be away from the boys" (9-1-16). They frequently told me that in physical education they could be with their friends and that "girls can relate to your problems so it is easier to relax around girls " (10-2-20). Many of these problems centered around their appearance "since we are all girls, we don't have to be embarrassed about how we look" (9-9-31). This is explored further in the next section of this chapter. No longer in an all girls class many of the girls in grades 11 and 12 wished that there were more opportunities to just be with girls. They frequently mentioned that in grade 9 and 10 they were able to "be themselves" and just have fun.

Another reason for viewing physical education as a break was because the young women felt that physical education was free of the pressures of the other subjects. These pressures were centered around exams and assignments and the feeling that there was always something that had to be done. Frequently the young women would explain that they had so many stressful classes and in physical education they were able to "move around and forget about school work" (10-5-7).

It also became apparent that because of all the stress in their lives physical education was in a way a support, a type of life raft for some whom I fear were in one way or another on their way down. The most

striking example of this occurred with a grade 9 girl who explained that there was so much stress in her life that during the previous summer she had contemplated suicide. She said that sometimes she needed a place to go and get away from things, and phys-ed was the only time in her day that she could do that. I can remember being stunned by this admission and wanting to reach out to this young woman and help her, instead I just listened and hoped that would be enough.

In a subsequent interview she suggested that,

> They should have an optional class, in a place kind of like a resource room, somewhere you can go and get help with your problems. A place where you can go and get help with your homework, and talk about your problems with other girls. (9-3-13)

The need to have support of this type was also identified by a young woman in the Canadian Teachers' Federation (1990) study,

> I'd like to be able to do this discussion every day. There is a lot of pressure out there and it's nice to just relax and discuss things about our lives with people like us. Thank you for giving me the chance to express myself. I hope that some things I've told you will help you decide on just what our futures hold. The younger generations may feel better about themselves if they are allowed to express themselves earlier. (p.16)

When I asked a young woman in my study if she had ever thought about going to a guidance counsellor to talk about her problems and the stresses she faced, she told me that she had done that but what she wanted was a place where a group of young women could just get together and talk. "Kind of like what we are doing right now" (9-3-13). For

this young woman, and many others, physical education was that place. A chance to have a much needed break from the pressures that they faced daily.

I Want To Be Her

Claudia, a beautiful model with a big smile, clear complexion and long brown hair, stares back from the picture in the magazine. With sultry eyes she beckons all to follow her beauty regime and guarantees that the self confidence she enjoys can be yours. At least that is what the article says. Darci, a grade 9 girl, has taped Claudia's picture and the accompanying article on the mirror in her bedroom. She takes a photograph of this display and tells me: "I took this picture because Claudia is my idol. She is beautiful. I want to be her. Whenever I look at her picture I see me but 1000 pounds bigger."

Accompanying Darci's photographs of Claudia is one of a blue eyed blonde haired Barbie doll carefully poised on Darci's dresser. Darci tells me that Barbie has the perfect body. Another is a picture of a red bikini carefully laid out on Darci's bed, she explains that she is "way too fat to wear it, but I keep it around just in case I lose a whole bunch of weight."

Stories such as this were told by every group of young women in the study. Most longed to change their appearance to that of a model in a magazine. The fashion model was seen literally as a model, "an example for imitation or emulation" (Webster, 1991, p.762). This desire to look like

the fashion models is almost impossible for the majority of young women who are experiencing the physical changes which accompany puberty,

> During the past twenty years the featured models in fashion and women's magazines have become ever thinner and now weigh a shocking twenty three percent less than the average women. . . Girls pore over the pictures in these magazines, studying the images as a primer for their own appearance. Surrounded by pictures of lithe, lean, long-legged beauty, the adolescent girl confronts a terrible irony. To mature normally she gains weight, especially in the bust and hips. The "fat spurt" is one of puberty's most dramatic physical changes. It adds an average of eleven kilograms of weight, an accumulation of body fat that is part of normal development and important for reproduction. Leg length as a proportion of total height decreases through out puberty, especially for girls who mature early. But the shape of girl before puberty, the form left behind during normal maturation, is the image that society says is beautiful. (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p.103)

To achieve this pre-pubescent look, many young women strive to change their bodies. Kostash (1987) explains that,

> Unlike boys for whom the body is an instrument of activity, of doing, girls merely inhabit their bodies; a girl is beautiful, *is* sexy. And so, except for the exceptional figure of the athlete or the dancer, a girls only mode of activity through her body is on the body itself -- to change it. (p.178)

The young women in this study were experts at being able to detect which parts of their bodies they would change. For some it was only a few features, for many, they wanted to change the whole thing. It was apparent that most young women viewed their bodies as segmented objects in need of repair. Vertinsky (1992) notes that, "girls often reduce their bodies to parts and problematize them, focusing on spot reduction

and resculpting various parts of their body" (p.388). Wolf (1990) provides an excellent example of this when she tells of her visit with an older cousin who was concerned about her weight, specifically her thighs and stomach, "Still compact in a one-piece kids body, I was alarmed to think that womanhood involved breaking apart into pieces that floated around . . ." (p.201).

I too was alarmed at how these young women viewed their bodies. I repeatedly asked them if they ever thought about living and experiencing the world through their bodies? Did they ever think about all the things that their bodies could do? Did they ever marvel at their bodies ability to run or walk or throw or catch or the hundreds of other things that their bodies could do? Comments and questions such as these were frequently met with blank stares and a quick return to the listing of their anatomical flaws in need of revision. These young women experienced a disconnected relationship with their bodies. To many of them, their bodies were objects; something for others to look at. Brown and Gilligan (1992) concluded,

> The changes in girls' bodies virtually disconnect them from the world of childhood and identify them in the eyes of others as women and thus with images of women and standards of beauty and goodness -- physical and moral perfection. . . . Girls become looked at, objects of beauty talked about and judged against standards of perfection and ideals of relationships. . .And girls learn to look at their "looks" and to listen to what people say about them. (p.164)

Talbot (1986) supports this and claims that,

> Females so often feel inadequate, clumsy and even inappropriate in P.E. Cultural conditioning teaches women and adolescent girls to value their bodies only in so far that they are sexually attractive. . . Thus they learn to dis-value their bodies as functional parts of themselves and to accept low expectations of health and fitness. (p.121)

I vividly remember a conversation with Camille, a grade 9 girl who ironically had recently lost ten pounds. She explained, "when I sit down I have to suck in because my stomach sticks out over my pants. I have thunder thighs, and my hips are humungus. Every night I do sit ups and I use my thigh master. I try not to eat but that is so hard." At this time I felt compelled to interrupt Camille to tell her that I thought she looked just fine. Her reply: "you think I look OK? Well lots of time the opinion that other people have of you and the opinion you have of yourself is a lot different, that is because you are looking down on yourself" (9-16-17). These young women were experts at looking down on themselves. Unfortunately, Camille went on to explain that when she cast her glance downwards, her body probably looked bigger to her than it did to me because I looked at her from the front or the side. The idea that she was being overly critical and putting herself down by figuratively looking down on herself did not occur to her. And why should it? This young woman and many like her are surrounded by expectations of how they should look.

Sadker and Sadker (1994) offer a poignant example of the importance a young woman places on being thin, and how her perception of herself is severely distorted.

> The fifteen-year-old girl looks to the right and left, as if checking for passing cars on a busy street. Seeing that no one is around, she slips outside the dressing room and hurries to look at the prom dress in the large mirror outside. She surveys her appearance critically and pushes the dress down over her hips several times as if to erase them. "I've been starving myself for weeks" she mutters. "I can't believe I'm still so fat." The tag on the dress she is wearing says size three. (p.102)

Where do these expectations to be thin come from? What causes these young women to look down on themselves because they don't have the body or look that they think they should have? Who sets the standards and how are these standards communicated? I asked the young women in the study questions such as these many times. They told me that "it is everywhere." Edwards (1993) determined that " . . .a host of cultural pressures combine to convey to the girls that they will be judged on how they look. . . . Fashion, teen magazines, movies, rock videos and television soaps continue to promote the increasingly thin ideal" (pp. 15-16). Found in the magazines they buy, the dolls they played with, and the behaviors and attitudes of their friends and families, (as they listen to their friends' and mothers' plans to diet and lose weight), the pressure to have the perfect body is all around them.

Susan: Girls are supposed to have an hour glass figure

Iris: Yah, 36- 24-36

Louise: Who tells you that girls are supposed to look like that?

Iris: Guys do.

Susan: It is in all the songs.

Camille: And on the TV commercials.

Melissa: Yah, the Barbie commercials, cause Barbie is really skinny.

Iris: And she has her feet made so that she can wear high heels.

Camille: Perfect arches and perfect feet.

Susan: Perfect legs, she has great legs.

Louse: So, do you ever feel that there is pressure on you to look that way?

Susan: Yah, every day.

Camille: All the time.

Iris: I would love to look like her (she points to a model in a magazine). (9-9-14)

To try to understand how advertising influenced these young women I purchased two of their favorite magazines; Young Miss and Seventeen. For the next few days each group of young women and I sat and looked through the magazines. I found this activity disturbing. Most of the young women looked at the models and felt that they too should,

and with a little self discipline could, look like that. The bodies of the models were indeed the standard that the young women wanted to attain, "she is the ideal, I mean she is so perfect. I would love to look like that" (10-5-8).

Many of them unable to meet this standard, told me that after they looked at magazines like these, they started to hate themselves. One young woman approached me in private to ask me if during our talk that day we were going to look at the magazines again. She explained that if we were, she would not join us. She was having a really bad day and she didn't think she could take it.

Sometimes I, or one of the young women would point out that these models have bodies that few of us could ever have. An example of this occurred in a discussion with a group of grade 9 girls,

Melissa:	I think the pictures are pretty unreal, I mean you would have to be anorexic to look like that.
Josie:	I wish I could tone up but I don't have the time.
Ali:	All these people are so skinny.
Josie:	I would love to be in there (magazine).
Ali:	Who wouldn't want to look like a model?
Morgan:	The guys would be after you!
Ali:	I am never going to look like that, I would love to but I can't.

Josie: We know that everyone can't look like that, but stuff like that affects us.

Morgan: When everyone tells you, you are wrong, it is hard to stick by what you believe. I mean we know better but it is hard. (9-10-25)

It is so very hard. Much harder then I had ever thought or realized. Edwards (1993) comments that, "for adolescent females, an inaccurate perception of the importance of thinness often leads to weight dissatisfaction and an overwhelming fear of fat" (p.15). The young women in this study were indeed dissatisfied with their weight but I cannot agree with the statement that their perceptions of the importance of being thin are inaccurate. For a young woman surrounded by the belief that thin is beautiful, her perceptions are very accurate. Who can blame her for believing what she sees and hears? As Melissa reminds us it is hard to resist pressures to look thin. And as a result of it being so hard, many young women engage in dangerous eating habits.

Take Susan for example. One day she brought her mother's Victoria's Secret catalogue for us to look at. I was so pleased as I listened to her tell the other young women in the group of the dangers of breast implantation, and how the photographers altered the pictures so that the models look skinnier then they really were. Unfortunately she concluded with,

> I wanted to order one of these bathing suits but I can't even wear my body suit anymore. Lately I have been trying not to eat but it is so hard. My mom orders a burger and I force myself not to want

one. I just can't handle it so I eat it anyway and then I feel worse. (9-9-22)

Even though Susan appeared to understand the deception of advertising and the physical dangers that accompany the bodies of the models, she still wanted to look like one. I found myself wondering what she <u>really</u> knew.

As powerful as the images in the magazines were, there were two other important sources of the pressure to be thin. The most surprising of these were the young womens' mothers. I cringed as I heard stories of mothers encouraging their daughters to "improve their shape" (9-9-16):

Ronie: I have a friend and her mom tells her she is fat.

Trina: My mom tells me that when she gets mad at me, you are fat, lose some weight. She says you are getting fat here and getting fat there.
She works out like 3 hours a day and she has this perfect body and it makes me mad because I never have any energy or time to work out.

Louise: Does she say that to your brother?

Trina: No, it is different for girls.
Then I get upset I will binge, I will just eat and eat.
The way I can calm myself down is if I eat a whole bunch and then I feel bad. (11X-3-8)

When Trina's mother became angry with her, the words that would cause her the most pain were spoken. The ultimate insult, not only telling her that she is fat but pointing out the exact locations. I am confident that

Trina knew all too well the parts of her body that did not meet the standard.

In yet another example of a mother encouraging her daughter to be thin, Marcie explained how her mother's words affected her. Her opening statement sounds a lot like a cry for help.

> Marcie: People are too concerned about what they look like if they would just concentrate on their head and their mind. My mom tells me that I am fat. My mom is really big and everything and she always tells me that I am too fat.
>
> Barb: Well Marcie doesn't eat and sometimes I am scared for her because she does come and tell us what her mom says about her being fat. I mean this is her mom telling her this, of course it is going to affect her.
>
> Marcie: It is really hard when your mom says it. I mean if one of my friends said I was putting on weight, I would be like yah, go away but when your mom says it. I don't care if other people say I am fat or ugly but when my mom tells me it really hurts. I mean I try to look good, and other people say I am skinny, but it is not enough for my mom. (10-2-5)

Sadker and Sadker (1994) also discovered that mothers put pressure on their daughters to lose weight,

> "Allison has such a pretty face," one mother told us after a shopping expedition. "But I can't stand to see her try on clothes. It's pathetic. If only she would lose more weight. I don't think I can shop with her anymore. She's so sensitive, and all we do is fight about it." (p.102)

The last and probably most important source of pressure on young women to have the slim, shapely body of the model, comes from boys.

> Rhonda: What guys think of you is so important. Like what does he think of me, oh my legs are too fat and everything. Just cause it is like if you wear shorts to school the guy may not have an interest in you at all but you know that they are checking you out and that makes you always think about it. (12-1-18)

The idea that boys were always watching them came up many times. It seemed that no matter where they went the young women felt that they were on display. "Girls know what it feels like to be looked at all the time" (9-4-17). Like a mannequin in a store window they were constantly gazed upon and it seemed that there was little they could do to stop it. To avoid being looked at some of the young women tried to hide their bodies by wearing what they called, "fat clothes". I learned that these are the big baggy clothes that are currently popular. "I wear them because the guys make me feel uncomfortable, they have never made fun of me or anything but something could happen" (10-4-7). And so because someone could say something about her body, she hides, she covers it up.

Sadly, boys appeared to frequently comment on the appearance of the girls. A grade ten girl told me "the guys think the models are the absolute gorgeous" (10-10-25). If a boy feels that a girl does not meet the standard he simply tells her: "My brother bugs me all the time he always

calls me a thunder thighs, a whale that kind of stuff. He tells me that I have the biggest hips in the world, stuff like that." I heard several stories like this. I asked Crystal if she ever said anything to her brother about his body? She told me it was different for guys because their bodies are "progressing" (11-1-15). "He used to be a real bean pole now he is getting muscles and he is looking like he has a chest, and his ribs don't stick out anymore" (11-1-11). I remember the other young women nodding in agreement. This is indeed a sad statement about how growth and maturation between the sexes is viewed. Boys bodies were seen to be progressing. Girls bodies on the other hand were seen to be deficient because they did not meet the standards set by the advertising industry, ". . . in a society where thin is beautiful, suddenly they (girls) grow fat on their chest, waist, buttocks, thighs. They move from self-confidence to self-conscious" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p.38).

> Puberty brings with it dramatic physical transformation. More often than not, boys view this change positively -- they look forward to approaching manhood and the height, bigger muscles and deeper voice that develop are all valued male traits. For girls, the physical changes associated with puberty can have quite a negative impact; more curves and a higher fat ratio don't seem like a positive development for the girl who wants to satisfy the societal ideal of thinness. (Girls Incorporated, 1994, p.3)

Although the boys in these girl's lives held the body of the model up as a standard of beauty for girls, there appeared to be no such standard for boys.

Sonja: Guys can be big and still look good.

Louise: And you can't be a big girl and still look good?

Sonja: Well the guys don't see it that way.

Cindy: The guys think that the perfect woman is a size 1.

Rhonda: And they are skinny and tall, you know the Cindy Crawford type. (12-2-8)

Many young women had boyfriends who told them how they should look. Sonja shared the following story about her previous boyfriend. "Joe was always telling me to lose weight, grow your hair, do your make up, do your nails, stuff like that" (12-2-14). The following conversation illustrates the dire consequences when the comments from a boyfriend are believed and acted upon,

Carly: My friend, she is anorexic, I mean she is so skinny it is sick. She is just doing it because her boyfriend told her that she looked a little chunky.

Louise: Is that what usually starts it?

April: Yah, you know stuff that they say.

Carly: Yah, when people who really mean something to you start calling you down, even if it is just as jokes you start to think well why are they saying that and why would they say it so often. You start to think about it and then you decide to do something about it. (11-1-4)

If a boy says something good about a girl then this also has the effect of encouraging others to look like her. Paula explained, "it is

because the guys say "look at her" and then you want to look like that. I want the guys to say that about me" (10-3-4). Paula's wishes were repeated often. If a boy said something good about a girl's body, she was on cloud nine if they were critical then she felt terrible about herself. "Well if they (boys) like what they see I like it when they say stuff, if they don't, I don't" (9-9-23). There was seldom any mention of feeling good about yourself that did not result from the comments of others, mostly boys. Sonja, a grade 12 girl felt that the comments from boys were good because they forced you to be concerned about how you looked.

Rhonda: I am just always paranoid that people are looking at me. I always think that I am too fat or something. Like today, Troy said something to me about my weight and it really bothered me.

Sonja: Yah, but it keeps you in shape too, as long as you don't go overboard. (12-2-10)

Since their feelings about their bodies are so dependent on how the boys see them, it was not surprising to learn that many of the young women strictly monitored their diets. The following story however caught me completely off guard.

One Monday morning Deserai, a grade 9 student, was telling me about her weekend and how her mother thought that because she had a new boyfriend she was not eating. At first she told me that was not true but then later confessed that her mom was right. At lunch when she, her boyfriend and their friends went to the 7-11 she wouldn't eat her lunch she would just have gum. "I don't want to eat in front of him. I don't want to

look like a pig" (9-4-4). Connie, Deserai's best friend agreed and explained that when she and her boyfriend go for supper she doesn't eat very much for the same reason. I asked her what she would do if she was really hungry? She told me that she would wait and if she was still hungry she would eat when she got home. I reacted strongly to this and the young women could not understand why I found this behavior so unacceptable. They asked me if I ate in front of my husband, when I assured them that I most certainly did, they concluded that I did so because I had a husband and he would not divorce me if I got fat. In an attempt to show me that they were not alone in this behavior they told me that they would take a "survey" of their friends to see if they did this too. The results showed that everyone they talked to did not eat in front of their boyfriends. I too surveyed my friends and they shared in my shock and disbelief.

I heard only one story of boys telling girls that they liked the way that they looked.

Ronie: Do you remember when Tammy went out with Jason, he said "I like girls that are bigger cause if a girl is too skinny, it is like hugging yourself"

Bonnie: That is what the guy who I am going out with says.

Cory: God, I wish there were more guys like that. (11X-2-26)

I wish there were more boys like that too, but more than that I wish for a world in which a young woman can feel comfortable in her body and

not long for the body of a fashion model like Claudia, or anyone else for that matter. A world in which young women are welcomed and valued in any shape or size (Wolf, 1987). Until that time, many young women will continue to aspire to look like Claudia because they perceive that bodies like hers are valued in our society. I am afraid they are right.

I worry that for some of the young women with whom I spoke, for some of those smiling faces, this obsession with how they look will affect every aspect of their lives, and in some cases place limits on their futures. Edwards (1993) warns that "eating disorders are the extreme result of weight dissatisfaction and dieting that begins in adolescence" (p.17). A study in a high school in Ottawa found that 50 percent of the girls were dieting needlessly and harmfully (Feldman, Feldman, & Goodman, 1986). Although I did not explicitly ask the young women in this study if they were on diets I know that at least half of them were closely monitoring what they were eating. Rhonda, a grade 12 girl told me that most of her friends want to lose weight and to do this they go on what she called binge diets, "They will have coffee and juice and that is it. No one thinks of exercising, they just stop eating" (12-2-8). Sadker and Sadker (1994) conclude that the obsession that many young women have with being thin takes many forms. "Some young women skip breakfast or lunch or dinner, or all three. They exist on diet drinks and popcorn, their most predictable and reliable daily activity is checking their weight on the scale morning and night" (p.102).

It is apparent that many of the young women in this study were engaging in the behaviors that are related to eating disorders. Moriarity and Moriarity (1993) stress that all physical and health educators to be concerned about eating disorders. They explain that "eating disorders are often diet and fitness programs gone wild" (p.11). Ross (1988) notes that, "Physical education's recent emphasis on physical fitness as the goal serves to reinforce the notion that body and mind are separate entities. Inadvertently, the stress on physical fitness may be a contributing factor in the increase in anorexia nervosa . . . ." (p.238). Tinning (1985) calls on physical educators to address the "cult of slenderness" and encourages them to,

> . . . think of physical education classes in school as an opportunity for social engineering with respect to challenging the negative aspects of the pursuit of slenderness. We should be actively educating our pupils to the folly of the media portrayed stereotypes as image models for all people and of the dangers associated with various forms of weight loss (from starvation diets to excessive exercising) which are employed in an attempt to look like the media image. Moreover we should show in our own behaviours a tolerance of different body types. (p.13)

Although the young women with whom I spoke did not appear to be as concerned about their exercise patterns as they were about their diets, they all wanted more activities in physical education that would help them to lose weight.

A few weeks ago I found a For Better or Worse cartoon that accurately summed up my feelings as I watched and listened to the young women talk about their bodies. In the first three frames of the cartoon a

teenage girl stares into a mirror and thinks "If I had a different nose, I'd look better. A different nose and no glasses. If my eyes were bigger and my teeth were whiter, maybe I'd be pretty, even. If I had darker skin and a different body, people would think I was gorgeous!" In the final frame the girl flops on her bed and asks "But then how would they know it was me?!!" Though the thoughts of this character are similar to the young women in the study, the conclusions are dramatically different. The girl in the cartoon realized that by changing all those things she would lose herself. This is a point I tried without success to raise for the young women. Being someone different was so appealing that most were happy to lose themselves and they knew exactly who they would rather be.

Exposed

Filled with feelings of anxiety about their bodies these young women entered the physical education environment. It was not surprising to learn that certain activities in physical education class were the cause of concern for many young women. Such activities included: changing clothes and showering in front of others, being required to wear a physical education uniform, and the annual year end trip to the swimming pool. Due to the nature of these activities many of the young women felt very uncomfortable as their bodies were exposed for others to see. For many this was very difficult, for some intolerable. When asked to recall a "critical incident" from her physical education experiences Eva, a grade 12 girl who

stopped taking physical education after grade ten, in a voice filled with emotion told me,

> I remember in grade nine I had algebra in first class and that whole class the only thing I could think of was, Oh No, I have gym next. I worried myself about it so much, like I was just tormented about it. I made myself sick just thinking about it, I hated it so much. I just did not want to do it, I felt so awkward wearing that uniform and having to change in front of everyone, and then we had to shower, Oh God it was so awful. All during Algebra I couldn't do any work, I couldn't concentrate I was just thinking about having gym next. (12X-2-12)

Changing in front of others was not a concern for all young women. The young women who did mention it felt that since they were not able to change in private they were again reminded that their bodies were not how they wanted them to be, "when you look at other people you don't notice their bad things you just see that they are really, really, skinny and you think that you have to look that way, you think oh, I wish I had their legs" (9-9-18). Others explained that when they were changing they tried to hide parts of their body. "if you have thunder thighs or something, when you change you try to hide them" (9-9-18).

For some grade nine girls changing in front of others raised the complex issue of homophobia:

Camille: When you change you make sure that you don't look at anyone else. You might be just looking somewhere else but it looks like you are looking at another girl.

Melissa: If you do, people think you are a lesbo.

Iris: Then people start spreading rumors.

Louise: So when you change you just look straight down?

Group: Yup.

Susan: You change really fast and then you get out of the locker room. (9-9-32)

Another group of grade 9 girls explained that they used to be friends with a girl, but when she started to watch them change they "dropped her". Several grade 10 girls told me that if a girl can beat a boy at a sport the boys will call her a butch. Griffin (1989d) states, "Because of the fear and stigma associated with homosexuality, homophobic name calling and accusations of homosexuality serve as effective social controls to keep people, especially young people acting safely within the bounds of traditionally-accepted gender roles" (p.30).

Feeling uncomfortable about showering after class was an issue that cut across every grade of young women. No group of young women questioned the need to shower. However, they all had complaints about the lack of privacy. The cry for shower curtains was universal. It was interesting to learn that although many of the young women had attended schools other than Murdoch, none of them had seen curtains or partitions in any of the other schools' locker rooms. The worst arrangement for showering were the pole showers where, as Terri explains, "they have five showers around this pole and the water comes out. Five girls standing around a pole looking at each other, as if I would want to shower like that" (11X-2-23).

It is easy to understand why young women who are so uncomfortable with their bodies would place the need for privacy as a very real concern. To achieve privacy many of the young women resorted to showering in their bathing suits or having a friend hold up a towel for them and of course the friend had to promise to look away. In her study of girls' physical education programs in England, Scraton (1987) also learned that many young women were concerned about showering after physical education classes,

> Anxiety around physical education for adolescent young women is also caused by showering after a lesson and indeed changing in large group changing rooms. This relates to the fact that girls reach puberty and mature at different rates . . . the physical nature of physical education intensifies this problem. (p.25)

Murdoch did not have a compulsory shower rule. Stories from the students who had been at other schools led me to conclude that Murdoch was the exception, not the rule. The young women who had attended schools with compulsory showers explained that to avoid showering they would wet their towels so that the teacher would think they had showered. This was not always possible as in some schools the teacher would stand in the locker room at the door to the showers, and check the young women off as they went by. In such a situation, Eva, explains that not only was having the teacher monitor her showering uncomfortable, the walk to the showers in a tiny locker room was also very difficult.

> When you went to the shower you had to walk by all these girls and my locker was way, way, way at the end. So with this tiny little

> towel that doesn't cover anything you had to walk through all these people saying excuse me, excuse me. Then they would all turn to see you, so you had to stand there waiting for everyone to move, it was the worst. (12X-2-9)

Sometimes showering became too much for Eva to deal with and she would just get dressed and wait for the bell. She explains what would often happen next,

> It would be like two minutes before the bell and my teacher would come and grab me by the arm and take me back into the locker room and hand me a towel and say "OK, now take a shower". Then she would stand there and yell at me. (12X-1-9)

Chandler (1980) accurately concludes, "some girls suffer a great deal from adults who do not understand that their bodies are private and precious to them (p.50). Unfortunately Eva suffered terribly.

Murdoch, like the other schools in the district, required a compulsory physical education uniform for students in grades 9 and 10. My first recollection of student concern about the uniform occurred during my second day at the school. I watched and listened as a class of grade 10 girls begged their teacher to allow them to bring their own shirts and shorts the next class as they were going outside to play tennis. They did not want "everyone" to see them in their uniforms. When the class was outside the teacher remarked to me that she didn't realize how "exposed" (her words) they were outside. I agreed as the young women seemed to be distracted by every car and every person who passed by the courts. Chandler (1980) states, "To have to clothe their body in an unbecoming

PE kit which exposes parts of them they prefer to keep covered is for them a matter of real suffering" (p.51).

The issue of wearing a physical education uniform was raised by every group of young women with whom I spoke. All of the young women agreed that you should change your clothes for physical education but very few supported the wearing of a compulsory uniform, "students should wear what they want, but they should have to get changed" (10-6-18).

Of the few who favored wearing a uniform, many were in grade 11 and 12. This was surprising because not having to wear a uniform was often cited as one of the positive things about grade 11 and 12 physical education. It was almost as though the uniform was a rite of passage; they had to wear it so the others should have to wear it too. However they did think that the shorts were too short. The grade 9 and 10 girls who supported the uniform gave reasons which often centered around the benefits of everyone looking the same, "because there is a uniform you don't have to worry that someone has nicer shorts than you or really nice sweats. I look to phys-ed as a chance to get away from all the stuff about clothes" (11-5-16). "Wearing a uniform is better because then you are not judged by what you wear" (9-8-12).

The majority of the young women who disliked the uniform did so because of the shorts. This is not surprising when one recalls the extremely negative feelings many of the young women had about their bodies. Since so many felt comfortable in baggy jeans it is easy to understand how being required to wear shorts would be a source of great

dissatisfaction. When I asked if they were permitted to wear sweats, the young women told me that they could only wear them if they were going to be outside.

> Sonja: The shorts are definitely a big part of phys-ed, you might think that it is just an outfit and it has nothing to do with phys-ed but it has a lot to do with how people feel about phys-ed. Because with the right clothes you can hide a lot of your weight.
>
> Rhonda: Yah, because we are in grade 12, we can wear something that we feel comfortable in. You can just put something baggy on or if you are feeling good on that day, you can wear shorts and a tank top. (12-1-18)

Now that I understand a little more about how these young women feel about their bodies it is not surprising that a piece of clothing like a pair shorts would cause them so much concern. "Those shorts made you really self conscious like I think it is the way you think about yourself and when you are wearing those shorts it is hard to think many good things about yourself" (12X-1-10). Rhonda, a grade 12 student raised a point I had not considered, "It's like you get the shorts and you are in the beginning of grade 9 and then over the next two years you kind of grow. I mean your body changes and they don't fit you" (12-1-5). When I heard this, I was reminded of how I feel when I reach for a piece of clothing that used to fit me but is now too small. I must admit that I usually do not feel very good about it, but, I have the luxury of choosing not to wear it. These young women have no such choice and I worry now that if the shorts no

longer fit, this could serve as yet another reminder that their body is changing and may not resemble the ones in the magazines. Those images seem to stay eternally young and slim.

Even though in grades nine and ten the young women did not have physical education with the boys there were times when the boys could see them and this heightened their anxiety about the shorts.

> I mean you weren't in class with the guys but the guys were around you and you had to wear those stupid uniforms and the shorts were like skin tight and so short and they didn't cover anything and the guys were just over there and it was so humiliating the clothes that you had to wear. (12X-1-2)

The young women repeatedly questioned why they had to wear shorts. "Why do we have to wear those short shorts? Why can't we just wear what we feel comfortable in?" (9-9-10). I am afraid that I had few answers for them.

Swimming in a coeducational setting raised the most concern around the issue of feeling vulnerable or exposed. The young women were scheduled to participate in a half day of swimming at a local outdoor pool during the first week of June. This gave me the opportunity to listen to their concerns before they went swimming and to talk to them once the swimming class was over. Early in the study while talking with a group of grade 9 girls, I asked them if there was anything about physical education they would like to talk about. I vividly remember Camille raising her head, nodding and softly saying, "I am worried about the swimming. Can we talk about that?" (9-9-22). Camille was not alone.

Being in a bathing suit in front of classmates was the cause of much concern for almost all the young women. Several expressed the fear that the boys would look at them and laugh. Audrey, a grade eleven student who participated in the pilot study explained, "being in front of guys in your bathing suit is so tough because people don't feel good about themselves." Some were concerned about the derogatory comments that would be made in the hall after the boys had seen them in their bathing suit, "they will say stuff like 'ha, ha, remember her in her bathing suit" (9-9-23). Again the issue of boys looking at them and passing judgment on their bodies was raised.

The group of young women in grade 11 who had chosen not to take physical education were the only ones to express any concern about other young women commenting on their bodies. For all other young women the concern centered around comments from the boys. Many said that swimming would be much better if it was just the girls or if the boys had to stay on the other side of the pool. "I'd rather it was all girls that way nobody is worried about, oh my shirt is this way or am I showing off too much" (10-4-7).

The concern about swimming with the boys was also expressed by the young women in the pilot study, "When we first knew we were going to swim with the guys there were a lot of girls who were insecure; you know it was like 'oh my god, the guys are going to see us' and 'oh no, it is not like they don't laugh at us enough already'." Others related past experiences of swimming with the boys in other physical education classes, "When we

went swimming last year there were lots of guys who would say stuff like 'look at that fat chick, or she has no boobs', stuff like that." Alexis told the group, "You guys, that is why I don't go on the diving board anymore . . .I don't like standing there waiting my turn because they can all see me and they scream stuff." When I asked the young women in the pilot study how they would change the swimming, one replied, "Oh that's easy, just let us swim by ourselves. It's not that I don't want to swim, I just don't want to swim with the boys."

As the time passed and the day of swimming approached it became apparent that many of the young women had elaborate plans to either avoid the swimming altogether or try to cover up as much as possible. The girls in grades 9 and 10 were almost unanimous in their plans to wear T-shirts over their bathing suits. "I am going to find a really humungus T-shirt and then they won't be able to see so much" (9-9-20).

The most startling example of the need to hide her body came from Barb, a grade 10 girl. Prior to going swimming she had arranged with her physical education teacher to accompany her to the side of the pool. She was going to jump in with her T-shirt and shorts on and then take her shorts off in the water and toss them to the teacher. "That way no one will see my bum" (10-4-7).

Two girls in grade 11 told me that most of the young women in their class were going to say that they had forgotten their bathing suits and then play volleyball on the court beside the swimming pool. There were also the young women, and there were quite a few of them, who were planning

on skipping the event all together. Some had planned to forget about the swimming excursion and go to school to attend their regularly scheduled classes. Others told of plans to pretend to try to go but then get delayed by, a flat tire, no gas, visiting grandmothers. You name it, they had probably thought about using it as an excuse.

The feelings and actions of these young women support the conclusions reached by Scraton (1992),

> The annual mixed swimming galas and athletic meetings were identified as a main focus of harassment. In these situations girls run the gauntlet of persistent comment on their personal appearance and sexuality. While some girls respond by attempting to hide their bodies by dressing in loose clothing, many others opt out to avoid being the target of innuendo and sexist comment. Clearly the assumption about women's bodies, as objects to be looked at, admired and criticized are intensified in settings of mixed activity, particularly during the sensitive years of adolescence. (pp. 92-93)

In frustration I asked them if they realized that this half day away from school was supposed to be a treat for them? This question was frequently met with a look of surprise and many suggestions of what they would rather do with a half day devoted to physical education. Many wanted to bike ride, walk the trail at the river or go to another pool and swim with just the girls. I also asked them if their teacher knew how they felt about the swimming? Their response, "Well last year when we went most of us, all we did was wear our shorts and a T-shirt, and she asked us why we weren't going in. We just told her we didn't want to, but she didn't get the hint" (10-3-6). However I think their teacher did get the hint as the

day before they were to go swimming she told the young women that they did not have to wear their bathing suits and swim if they didn't want to. This news was greeted with sighs of relief and lots of smiles.

When we were discussing going swimming I shared with the young women the following story. It describes the experience of a young woman in a physical education class in Ontario,

> We were in phys-ed one day, and we were swimming and we came back in. We were soaking wet, and there was a line of guys down in the locker bay; they all had these numbers, and when you walked by they'd hold up a number for you, like you were a 3 or a 10 or whatever, but they never said anything. They just held up the number and put it down . . . They were all sitting in a row . . . you had to walk through the main hall to get to the change rooms. I was really mad and I told them so . . . they laughed. (Staton & Larkin, 1993, p.13)

I asked the young women if something like this could happen at Murdoch. Many of them said that it could easily happen and quite a few of the young women had stories of similar incidents. They all felt sympathy for the young women in the story but few expressed any feelings of anger towards the boys. Some offered comments such as "boys are just like that" or "boys are like that until they grow up." After hearing the story the young women were more interested in discussing strategies they would have used to avoid having to walk through that hallway or ways in which they could minimize the pain of the encounter. Some decided that they would go in pairs, others said that all the young women should walk through at once, still others wondered if there was an exit from the deck into the shower room that the young woman in the story could have taken.

I do not recall one young woman feeling totally outraged at the behavior of the boys. None of the young woman said that they would tell the teacher. Many were happy however that the young woman in the story had told the boys off but most assured me that they could not have done that. They explained that if they said something to the boys, their comments would have become more frequent and more cruel.

A young woman interviewed in research conducted by Sadker and Sadker (1994) expressed feelings similar to many of the young women in this study, "You just have to let it go. Just say, 'sure whatever', I have a friend who freaked out when the guys said gross things. Now they totally hate her here. She doesn't even want to come to school" (p.110). To many young women the comments of boys seem to be something that they felt they had to endure. Alexis sums up the feelings of many, "There's not much we can do about it . . . it makes you feel uncomfortable because you are never sure if they are watching or not, and then you are always worried about what they are going to say."

On the half-days that the young women were scheduled to go swimming, I went to the pool to observe and talk with them in an informal setting. I was surprised to see that many of the young women in grade 9 and 10 with whom I had spoken, were in the water and appeared to be having a very good time. Barb did enter the water as planned, and once in, seemed to relax and mix with both boys and girls. Most of the girls in grade 11 sat on the lawn in their shorts and T shirts or played volleyball on the court beside the pool.

After the swimming I had the opportunity to ask the students in grade 9 and 10 about their time at the pool. Most of them had a good time, telling me "it was awesome" and "it was right on." I asked them why it was so much better than they thought it would be? Marcie explained:

> The night before I was like Oh God, Oh God I am going to look so terrible and then some guy is going to say something, Oh God. Then I got there and I was really self conscious and no one said anything and I just kind of loosened up and it was OK. (10-5-5)

Kelly agreed, "usually you think that the guys are going to make fun of you or something like that but actually I didn't see them make fun of anybody" (10-5-5).

Feelings like this were expressed by many who said that they were able to have fun swimming because the boys didn't say anything bad about their bodies. It is hard for me to be positive about this. It is so unfortunate that their idea of a good time is to be able to participate in an environment free of harassment and if they are not sure that this will be possible they either avoid it altogether or cover up so that they can minimize the harassment.

Conclusion

So what is to become of these young women? Will they grow up continuing to believe that their bodies are objects to be looked at, as something so deficient that they need constantly to monitor and treat it's

defects? Or will they begin to take their bodies back and appreciate themselves for who they are and stop trying to be someone else? Will they ever experience the joy of movement that their bodies can give them?

In trying to find answers to questions such as these, I asked the young women what physical education could do to make them feel more comfortable about their bodies. Several mentioned that they wanted more time in the weight room, trips to fitness centers and more aerobics and step aerobics. Others wanted to learn more about nutrition, low fat diets and ways to increase their metabolism. Unfortunately, I sensed that very few of these young women wanted to do these activities for any health or fitness value, most simply wanted increased opportunities to change the way they looked.

The grade 11 girls who were not taking physical education answered this question by telling me how physical education had made them feel uncomfortable about their bodies. Several young women expressed dissatisfaction at having to be weighed in physical education. They gave numerous examples of physical education teachers making verbal comments about their weight. "They would tell people in the class, you have to gain weight, you have to lose weight" (11X-1-26). Comments such as these no doubt helped to speed their exit from physical education. Zoe, a young woman who had transferred to Murdoch from another school told the following story:

> In my other school we did this summer thing, it was like a fitness program and we weighed ourselves in June and then we had to try

> to lose as much weight as we possibly could over the summer. Then when school started again there was this big chart on the wall, how much you weighed at the beginning and how much you weighed at the end. Including your fat pinch thing. Of course the anorexic thing was going on and lots of girls began to starve themselves because they knew they were going to be weighed in and they didn't want a big number put on the wall. I made a joke of it and ate as much as I could just to gain weight. I just laughed about it. (11X-1-26)

When the other young women in the group heard this story they all began to talk at once telling me, and the others, that they just wouldn't go, they would fail, they would quit. Anything to avoid such humiliation. I can't help but wonder what this physical education teacher was attempting to do. Perhaps she thought that by monitoring her students' weight she would encourage them to be active over the summer holidays. Few of the young women in this study controlled their weight through exercise; most of them as I have described simply avoided eating. I can only hope that this teacher had no idea what such a program would mean to the young women and the lengths to which they would go to avoid being exposed.

There was one thing about physical education that all the young women agreed on. The most important factor in their feeling comfortable in physical education was, without a doubt, an all girls class. This will be discussed in a subsequent chapter but I cannot leave this issue without stressing this point. The importance of an all girls physical education class is easy to understand when one reflects upon the powerful influence of the presence and comments of boys. There was not one young woman in any

grade with whom I spoke that felt that compulsory physical education (grade 9 and 10) should be taught in coeducational classes.

CHAPTER THREE

FUN IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

Introduction

> If I was in charge of phys-ed, you know the one who makes all the decisions, I would tell the teachers to make phys-ed fun. The best thing that we could promise someone that took phys-ed, was that they would have fun. Fun is the most important thing. (9-9-33)

The importance of physical education being fun emerged early in the study and was discussed by every group of young women with whom I met. I frequently wondered what they meant by fun and why it was so important to all of them. I recall them rolling their eyes in frustration as I repeatedly asked, "yes, but why is that fun (or not fun), what makes it fun?" They tried their best to explain it to me.

I must admit that at the time I expected concise, tight responses. I wanted them to give me a couple of examples of what things were fun, why fun was important, and then I thought we could move on. This however, was not the case. I now see that such responses were not only impossible they were totally inappropriate.

While I may have viewed having fun as a part of the physical education experience, the majority of the young women saw it as the entire reason for participating in physical education. It was the criteria

given for an activity being liked or disliked and it was often the grounds upon which a young woman decided if she would continue her participation in the physical education program.

When I first heard the young women mention fun I became very nervous as I had read numerous articles warning about the danger of including fun as an objective in physical education programs. Bean and Kinnear (1989) stress that, "If this concern with fun becomes an obsession, there is a danger of jeopardizing the educational content of physical education programs at the secondary and post secondary levels" (p.19). Whitehead (1988) maintains that students in physical education classes, " . . . may on occasion have fun, but physical education is not centrally a vehicle for trivial diversionary occupation" (p.155). In an often cited study Placek (1983) reports that the objective of student learning appears to be lost in teachers' desire to keep their students "busy, happy and good" (p.49). Williams (1994) recently warned physical educators that an overemphasis and concern with students having fun may land them in the "Physical Education Hall of Shame" (p.17).

Nowhere in the aims and objectives of Saskatchewan's recently developed Physical Education: Policy Foundation Paper (1992) does the word fun appear. Instead it discusses "the development of positive attitudes which will focus on physical activity, fitness, self-concept, relationships with others, social behavior and personal and group safety" (p.3). As a member of the committee who provided input into the development of this document I must admit that although the concept of

fun may have been discussed, I probably would have fought the inclusion of the word fun in any of the objectives. My concern would lie with the risk of portraying physical education as a frill, something that a student could do with out. I shudder when I think of the public outcry if, in the current educational climate, a required subject listed fun as one of it's objectives. I worry that this would further marginalize physical education.

Concerns such as these filled me as I continued to hear the young women tell me that they wanted physical education to be fun. Marcie, a grade 10 girl, explained earnestly, "this is my only fun class, I only had room for one class and I wanted it to be fun" (10-4-2). When asked to offer a metaphor of physical education, Connie replied simply, "phys-ed is having fun" (9-8-9).

With some trepidation I continued to listen to the young women and I must admit I probably more than once tried to move them away from their commitment to fun. However, they would not be budged. I see now that this was a blessing. When I really listened to them and stopped being so worried about my feelings about physical education being fun I was able to understand fun as a much deeper and more complicated concept than I had previously contemplated.

Being Active and Having Fun

One of the most surprising things I learned was that regardless of whether they were currently enrolled in physical education or they had

chosen not to continue with physical education, the majority of young women in the study expressed a desire to be active during physical education classes. Only two young women with whom I spoke told me that they were just lazy and didn't want to do anything. I found this surprising as during my years of teaching I recall having to repeatedly coerce young women off the benches on the side of the gym. It seemed that I was constantly urging them to get moving. I vividly remember that there were some activities they really enjoyed and some that they did not, but when I look back I can honestly say that I do not recall that the majority of them wanted to be active. This study has helped me to see that perhaps I was not prepared at that time to look critically at the types of activities I was teaching. I feel that the stories and suggestions offered by the young women in this study have a great deal to offer those of us who are interested in improving the experiences of young women in physical education classes.

Many of the young women frequently commented that their enjoyment of an activity diminished when there were few opportunities to participate. "I didn't like tennis; there were not enough courts so people had to sit out" (10-3-13). "Cricket was fun but there were too many players and half the time you don't get to play" (9-9-26). Sydney, a grade ten girl who spoke to me during the pilot study commented, "Sometimes the good people are up there for ten minutes demonstrating, and we just stand there and watch. If I wanted to learn that way I'd watch it on t.v. I want to do the stuff, not watch someone else."

When asked to recall a memorable incident in physical education, Sylvia, a grade 11 girl not currently enrolled in physical education, explained that during a special afternoon of square dance there were not enough people to make squares so she had to sit out for half of the time. She had looked forward to the event and was very disappointed. These feelings are consistent with the early work of sport psychologist Terry Orlick. After interviewing many children participating in youth sports he concluded that "lack of involvement and not being part of the action were factors related to dissatisfaction and dropping out" (Wankel & Sefton, 1989, p.357).

In the first half of the school year many of the young women in grade ten had participated in a pilot phase of a new physical education curriculum called Wellness Ten. Few of the young women enjoyed this experience. The major reason for their dissatisfaction was that they were not as active as they wanted to be. Although the course was to have been piloted for the entire year, the teacher decided to return to the existing physical education course at the semester break. The young women were very happy with the return to the regular physical education program, "we have more fun now because we are more active. For 80% of the class we took notes. It wasn't fun because you didn't get to really experience anything, we just talked about it" (10-6-1). Most of the grade eleven girls who had taken Wellness Ten the previous year were equally dissatisfied with the program,

Pat: We had to do Wellness and I hated it, it was so stupid. It was basically a class, I mean you didn't do anything.

Annie: It was like taking physical education from a blackboard instead of actually doing it.

Pat: You learned about health and stuff, we never got to do anything. (11-5-1,2)

Many of the young women were quick to offer suggestions of how they would change physical education so that they could participate more fully and thus, according to them, have more fun. The bottom line seemed to be that they want to be active, but under the right conditions. For example, one day during one of our conversations a physical education class was outside playing softball. The group I was talking with at the time stopped and watched the game for a few minutes. I then asked them if they would rather have more than one game, they replied, "that would be way better because you have more chances to get up and actually play" (10-1-11). Carly, a grade eleven student explained that during a fitness unit, "we do a lot of talking about fitness and stuff, but I would rather just do it. We went to fitness facilities for four days and three out of the four days we toured the facilities, we didn't get to do anything" (11-3-17). During a tennis unit one of the young women told me that she wished there were only two or four students on a court, "it would make it more interesting, and more fun." When I reminded her that she would have to run a lot more and chase the ball if her partner missed it, she replied "I don't mind getting tired, I just want to play" (10-3-13).

Being Good and Having Fun

Closely related to this desire to be active was the notion that the activities deemed to be the most fun were the ones in which the young women felt that they had the skills to participate. As they put it, the "stuff that we are good at. It all depends if you can play it or not. If you can't play it you are not going to have fun" (10-1-12). These feelings may be an indication of what Csikszentmihalyi (1975) termed the Flow Model. He determined that enjoyment occurred when there was a balance between the challenges of an activity and the skills of the participant. Chalip, Csikszentmihalyi, Klieber, & Larson (1984) noted that, " in gym classes, the more students feel skilled, the more they wish to be doing whatever they are doing" (p.14). Borys, Daniels, Dallaire and Watkinson (1990) suggest that "when the learner is successful at an activity, she has fun" (p.17). In a study designed to explore the experiential quality of physical education for older women, Hill and Brackenridge (1989) reported that many women found physical education "pointless and boring. They enjoyed the activities which they felt they could do, and those where they didn't feel 'shown up' by coming last" (p.154).

The most popular activity for all groups and grades of young women was badminton, an activity in which they felt skilled . "I like badminton, it is easy to learn, and it was fun because it is not hard to hit the bird" (9-9-26). "Badminton is not that hard to catch on to. You don't have to be really good at it because the bird doesn't come too fast" (10-6-

13). I frequently observed that when given an opportunity to choose an activity to play during a free day or an open gym period, most of the young women in grades nine and ten chose to play badminton. I believe that this is an indication of their desire to be active. They chose something that they felt they could do. This is not surprising when one examines one's own choices of activities. Similar to many others I choose to participate in activities in which I feel skilled.

An interesting phenomenon appeared during a grade ten physical education class in which the young women had been permitted to choose the activity . While observing the class play doubles badminton I realized that not one group of young women were playing by the rules. The only rule they seemed to observe dealt with the boundaries. They served from anywhere on the court to anyone on the other team. When the shuttlecock dropped on one side of the court, the girl closest to it simply picked it up, served it and play resumed. With music playing in the background, many of the young women danced around the courts while waiting for play to resume. The gym was a sea of activity filled with much laughter. It seemed like the young women were having so much fun (LJ-2-6).

During a subsequent interview, I asked the young women why they did not follow the rules when they played badminton. They explained,

> Kelly: It is more fun. You don't have to sit there, you don't have to think about the score or anything like that you just pick it up and hit it.

> Marie: Like if you have to play against someone you don't know or someone who doesn't have really good abilities or if you don't have really good abilities, if you are just doing it for fun it makes both teams feel good about themselves. (10-5-12)

These same young women shared with me their feelings of frustration with the substitute teacher who, on the day of the badminton activity, moved around the gym telling them to play by the rules. They explained "that really takes the fun out of it" (10-5-11).

This idea of feeling good about yourself and your skill level emerged in other situations in which the young women told me that they had more fun when they did not have to play by the rules. "I like playing volleyball but not real volleyball. Last year we sat on the floor and played and that was really fun. I like beach volleyball too" (9-9-31). "I liked it when we didn't have to follow all the rules, like if we were playing baseball or something we could use different rules. We could just play and make up our own rules if we wanted" (10-6-1). One of the few positive comments about Wellness Ten occurred during a discussion about modifying rules, "A good thing about Wellness Ten is that we didn't have to follow all the rules . . .like if we were playing baseball or something we could use different rules or we could make up our own rules if we wanted to. No one cared if you did something wrong, it was fun" (10-6-1).

By attempting to ease the restrictions that playing by the rules placed upon them, these young women seemed to be asking for opportunities to participate. I found this desire fascinating. Aware that

they did not have the skills to participate in the "real" games, they wanted a chance to play on their terms. If they did not have an opportunity to modify the rules, they would opt for an activity that they could do:

Ali: I can't throw or catch or bat or anything, I tried to avoid going up to bat. The best time was in grade eight . . .they let the people who didn't want to play baseball, and that was pretty well all the nonathletic people, play kick ball. That was great.

Morgan: Kick ball was the best.

Josie: You don't need much coordination either, you just boot the ball, it was fun.

Ali: I mean I know I am not very good. Why would I want to play a game and have everyone see how bad I am? (10-7-27)

Ali asks a very good question. Why would she or anyone for that matter want to play a game that they are not good at? What fun would there be in that? Borys et. al. (1990) remind us that "it is only common sense that in physical activity, where performance is overt, positive feelings about the self arise from performances that can withstand the continued scrutiny of peers and others" (p.21).

Why were Ali and her friends put in a situation in which they did not have the skills to participate? Perhaps this is because the majority of the activities that comprise most physical education programs are ones that the physical education teachers themselves have excelled in. These tend to be the team games that comprise the athletic program. Ali and Morgan

told me that it seemed like they only did the activities that the teacher thought was fun; "it tended to be a lot of those team sports . . . we did a lot of basketball" (10-7-27).

It has been my experience that many high school physical education teachers hold rigid beliefs about the importance of playing a game by the rules. I think of a game such as volleyball that requires that all players regardless of skill use a regulation ball, serve from a designated area, and occupy a regulation court. Seldom in a high school setting are these rules modified. Yet, without modification many young women are at risk of not being able to do what they want the most; to participate, and be part of the action.

Perhaps, a more pertinent question however, is why, or how did these young women arrive in high school without the skills to participate in the activities offered in secondary physical education programs. Take volleyball or basketball for example. The young women repeatedly told me that they had taken these sports for years, yet many did not feel skilled and even more were bored with the repetition of the activity. The research of Placek (1982) may apply to the experiences of many of these young women. She reports that, "the teachers in this study were more concerned about student behavior than about transmitting a body of knowledge" (p.49). As I did not study teacher behavior I am hesitant to make such a conclusion. However, one does wonder what these students have done in physical education classes in the past. Were they just kept busy, happy and good as Placek (1982) suggests? If so, this is a real

tragedy as the young women repeatedly told me that they wanted to learn the skills that would help them to be more active. While discussing changes they would make to the physical education program Nancy explained that, "some people don't know how to do stuff so we would teach them so they can have fun" (10-6-19).

Learning is Fun

When asked to reflect upon their past experiences in physical education it quickly became apparent that the young women tended to view the activities in physical education classes as either fun or boring. Repeatedly the young women told me that if they learned something new, a new activity or a new skill, then they had fun, if they did not then they were bored. "You want to learn about the sport, you want to learn how to do it, but you don't want to learn the same thing over and over again" (10-5-17).

The repetition of the same activities was a source of great dissatisfaction to many of the young women " . . .you just get sick of it, you do the same thing day after day. Like if it is going to be boring you are not going to have fun anyway" (11X-3-15). "Yuck, we do volleyball every year. It's nice to learn something new for a change" (9-3-8). "We already got tennis in grade nine and ten, we already got all that instruction, it is so boring now" (11-2-1). This issue was also raised in the pilot study, "A lot of the team sports we do every year, you know, volleyball, basketball,

soccer, track. We do the same stuff year after year." These comments become clearer when considered in relation to Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) Flow Model. Chalip et. al. (1984) determined that if a balance between the skills of the participant and the challenges of the activity are not present then one of two states will occur: anxiety or boredom. "Boredom sets in when one's skills are greater than the challenges of an activity. Anxiety is defined as an imbalance between challenges and skills such that perceived challenges are greater than one's sense of skill" (p.109).

Both of these states were probably present in many of the young women. If they were not learning new skills they were bored. Their dislike of competition, which will be discussed later in this chapter, may have been a result of a lack of skills to meet the challenges of a competitive situation. However their hunger to learn new things and participate in different activities was clearly evident.

A group of grade ten girls reflecting on their past year in physical education offered the following comments,

Kelly:	We should do more interesting things, instead of the same thing over and over.
Barb:	Like this year was just a repeat of last years activities.
Tanya:	It was like the same thing over and over again, the same units and everything.
Marie:	It was kind of a waste of time that way. (10-5-9)

These same young women were particularly frustrated with a basketball unit they had recently completed. "We didn't learn anything

new. You are just learning everything you learned in grade nine anyway" (10-5-9). Many young women in the pilot study also commented on the repetition of activities, "Every year we do the same stuff and we already know it, I mean we have been dribbling a basketball since grade four. Don't they understand that we get it already?", and "We do the same things over and over again, this is the bounce pass and this is the lay-up, it is so boring."

On the other hand Pat and Annie agreed that "the First Aid unit was good. I learned a lot" (11-5-7). Another grade eleven girl suggested "They should do more fun stuff with us so that we will want to do it , like not just the same old thing. Do step climbing and stuff, take us to a gym in grade nine and ten. They do that kind of stuff in grade eleven but by then it is too late" (11-2-20). Many of the girls in grade ten were looking forward to grade eleven for that reason, "phys-ed is going to be so much fun next year because we are doing different things" (10-4-3). Two grade nine students, Connie and Deserai, were already bored with some of the activities in high school physical education. "you lose interest after a while if they teach you the same things over and over again, like volleyball and basketball" (9-8-12).

During my time at the school, the Student Council sponsored a dunk tank. This activity was very popular with many of the young women. Deserai took a picture of her friends who had recently been dunked. Upon seeing the picture she told me,

> This picture makes me think of friends and fun and going out and having a good time, leaving all worries and cares behind you for now. It also makes me think of the word different as this is not something we do every day, week or even once a month. I think we would have more people participating and taking phys-ed if we would do more different things, this would keep us interested and eager to learn. Not doing something over every year that we already know how to play. (9-8-6).

As so many young women were bored and frustrated by the repetition of activities it was not surprising to learn that a new activity was enjoyed a great deal. "I liked cricket because it was new and we had never done it before, you get sick of the same thing over and over again (9-5-18). "I liked broomball, I had never played it before and it was fun" (11-5-1). I was surprised to learn that they even looked forward to activities they had never heard of, "I don't even know what lacrosse is, but I'd like to try it" (9-3-12). It seemed like they were desperate to learn and participate in new activities. Many of the young women in the pilot study had learned rugby in physical education the previous year and had fond memories of this experience, "Last year we all learned rugby, just with the girls, it was so much fun, we had never done it before and it was hilarious." These same young women were looking forward to a trip to the University to climb on the wall in the outdoor education center. I asked them what it was about "the wall" that excited them so much,

> Alexis: It's different from basketball, volleyball and badminton. It is something we have never done before.

Sydney: I'm excited just to see if I can do it . . .it's different. I just want to say I tried, even if I only get up a few feet.

One of the most popular units of activity during my time at the school was what the teacher called the "Open Unit". During this time the girls in grades nine and ten could choose what they wanted to do for seven physical education classes. The teacher separated the class into seven groups and each group chose an activity. The young women enjoyed this a great deal and told me, "they should have more choice in phys-ed. like when we had that open unit and everyone got to pick something, that was fun" (9-9-8). A grade ten girl explained that "the open unit is a time when no one else can tell you what to do, we got to decide as a class" (10-3-14). Repeatedly the young women suggested that they should have opportunities to choose their activities, "instead of having one big open unit, every now and then, once in a while drop the curriculum and let us do what we want" (10-3-15). Even the much maligned Wellness Ten received some support because "we got to choose our own warm-ups and stuff, and that was good" (10-6-1). The importance of choice was also stressed by the young women in the pilot study, "We should have more days when we could do what we want. I mean let us pick, give us choices and then let us pick. Some people can play basketball and some can go to the weight room."

A very interesting point was raised by a group of grade eleven girls. They told me that learning a new sport was fun because that meant that there would be others who, like themselves, would not be good at it. They

explained that they were tired of the boys being able to do all the activities. Many felt that a new activity offered a more equitable environment. "Everyone was brutal in curling, it was so much fun " (11-5-7). Colleen explained that learning a new sport was fun because "then no one can look down at you, they are no good at it either, they can't talk about you and say like she is no good" (11-5-11). Aerin was looking forward to grade eleven physical education for similar reasons, "You learn different sports, like golf, and cross country and downhill skiing. So now there will be guys who aren't as good as the girls at some of the stuff, like some of the girls will be better so it is more equal" (10-6-8).

In addition to learning new activities many of the young women expressed a desire to participate in things that they felt were relevant to them. Heather, a grade 12 student who stopped taking physical education after grade ten, poses an interesting question, "There wasn't anything that I really specifically hated, there were just some things that I didn't really see the point in taking them. I mean, what is the point in learning how to throw a shot put if you have no interest in track?" (12X-1-10).

Like Heather many of the young women questioned the value of the activities that comprised the physical education program. As previously stated there was much dissatisfaction with the sports done every year such as volleyball and basketball. Many of the young women had suggestions of what they wanted to learn, "they should teach us stuff that we do, not stuff that we never do. We should do aerobics and stuff like that" (9-9-30). "Sports is all we ever did in phys-ed. I really liked the

dance, but we hardly ever did it" (11X-1-19). This desire to participate in dance, aerobics, step aerobics and visit fitness clubs was expressed by every girl with whom I spoke. These activities were also desired by the young women in the pilot study.

As was discussed in a previous chapter I am a little nervous about these wishes to participate in activities that I fear are desired because so many of the young women want to change the appearance of their bodies. In addition, I agree with the many authors who suggest that activities of this type tend to perpetuate what some believe are traditional, female activities (Borys, et. al.,1990; Dahlgren, 1988; Lenskyj, 1986; Scraton, 1992; & Vertinsky, 1992). However I think that as physical educators we have a wonderful opportunity to not only offer activities such as these, ones that the young women clearly want, we also have an opportunity to educate them about the positive and the negative aspects of these activities. Such an approach, I fear, is seldom offered at many of the contemporary fitness clubs.

This fear was realized during a class I accompanied to a local fitness club. The instructor began his presentation by telling the class that he was going to tell them everything they needed to know about how to be fit and eat well. He went on to explain that fat on the waist and upper thigh is cosmetically harmful and that many people have a waist that is too big in relation to their hips. During the time he was speaking several other employees took students, weighed them and measured their body fat. I

vividly remember one girl, near tears, refusing to go. I later learned that she had struggled with an eating disorder for years (LJ-4-23).

Friends and Fun

Being able to participate in activities with their friends was a key component of having fun in physical education classes, "having your friends around makes it fun" (10-1-14). When I asked a group of grade nine girls how they would ensure that girls had fun in physical education classes they suggested,

> Susan: We would tell them that they could be with their friends, so that they could talk.
>
> Iris: Like when we play badminton, they could go in groups of people that they are friends with.
>
> Camille: They could just have fun and be stupid with them. (9-9-23)

When given an opportunity to tell what she would have changed about grade 12 physical education, Rhonda explained that she wished there would have been more of her friends in the class, "it really hurts if you only have one friend in the class and they are not there" (12-1-12).

Many young women also expressed a preference to learn skills in small groups of friends. "In basketball, we got into little groups and played two on two, that was way more fun" (9-9-25). "I liked badminton because there were only two of us; when there is a whole big team a lot of people

take over and they don't help anybody, they hog the ball and they don't include other people" (9-9-26). During my time at the school many of the young women in the study tried out for the cheerleading team. They repeatedly told me they were having fun. One day they invited me to come and watch them practice. I went and sure enough there they were jogging, skipping, stretching, dancing and laughing. The next day I asked April why she was enjoying the tryouts so much. She explained, "you are with small groups of people and you are learning new things, like the dance. It is so much fun" (11-4-8).

Being with friends also gave some of the young women a feeling of security and relief if they were worried about their skill level. "In badminton and stuff you are hitting the bird and if you screw it up it is like whoopsie and you laugh at what you did, but if you didn't know her it is really hard" (10-1-15). Jazz and modern dance were very popular activities. The young women often told me that they liked dance because they could practice and make up dances with their friends. They explained that they were not afraid to practice and show each other what they could do "getting into groups for jazz dance was so much fun" (11X-1-11).

Barb, who greatly valued her time in physical education with her friends expressed concern for those who did not seem to have friends in physical education, "we are all friends, but some people in the class feel left out . . .I feel bad for them" (10-1-5). This valuing of friends and relationships was evident with every group of young women with whom I spoke and was often one of the most important reasons for liking physical

education "you get to be with your friends and it is not structured like the other classes, you can talk to your friends and that is really important" (10-6-19). The importance of friends was also evident in many of the photographs that the young women took. Numerous pictures of young women arms around each other, smiling, laughing and being together filled almost every role of film.

Competition is Not Fun

Very few of the young women with whom I spoke had positive feelings about competition. Comments such as "it (phys-ed) was too competitive" (12X-1-2), and "playing basketball is fun, but not if you are playing competitively" (9-5-18) were abundant.

Lever's (1976) study on the gender differences in play determined that while boy's games tended to be filled with arguments, the game was seldom terminated because of these disputes. Instead the boys tended to enjoy debating the rules and, when necessary, they simply replayed the point. In contrast Lever observed that if a dispute arose in a girls game, the girls tended to end the game. Gilligan (1982) concludes that this is an example of the importance that girls place on maintaining relationships, "Rather than elaborating a system of rules for resolving disputes, girls subordinated the continuation of the game to the continuation of relationships" (p.11).

I feel that many of the young women in this study placed a high degree of importance on relationships and that this played a large role in their dislike of competition. Deserai, a grade nine girl explains,

> I am not really much for trying out for teams and competing, I just want to do it for the fun of it. I don't really like competing against people because people get angry because you beat them or something or you feel discouraged because you thought you were good at it. Or if you are really really into the game and someone misses it, then you might get angry at them. It is like the winning touchdown or whatever and you feel bad because you missed it or the other person misses it and you feel bad. (9-1-9)

Later in our conversation Deserai told me of a "good memory" of grade nine physical education, "one good thing is when Connie and I tried to do stuff ourselves, like remember when we tried to get forty in a row?" (9-8-10). It became apparent that Deserai and many of the young women in the study enjoyed cooperative rather than competitive activities. Gilligan (1982) noted that girls' play tends to be more cooperative in its organization. Deserai's preference for working with her partner rather than against another seems to be an example of this. These findings are supported by Knoppers (1988), who, in citing the work of Gilligan (1982) and Shakeshaft (1986) concludes,

> The emphasis on competition may also be problematic for those who value an ethic of care, an ethic routed in a sensitivity to the feelings of others. They may hesitate to endorse activities which emphasize the "I win, you lose" ethic as it may damage their connections and relationships with others Instead those who value the ethics of care may respond more to activities which emphasize cooperation. Since more girls than boys tend to endorse an ethics

> of care, the domination of competitive activities in the curriculum would have more impact on them than it would on boys. (p.55)

While working on this chapter I witnessed an event that seemed to be an excellent example of the feelings of many of the young women in this study. While waiting for friends I watched a group of boys and girls learn to wind surf. After the lesson the students were told that they could now practice their wind surfing in the bay. The students grabbed their boards and ventured to various parts of the bay. Two pairs of boys and girls caught my attention. The boys spent almost an hour racing each other to a buoy and back to the shore. The first one in to the shore would run on the beach, do a little victory dance, and loudly proclaim that he was the fastest. This occured with each victory and at the end of the hour one was declared the winner. The two girls busied themselves by spending almost twenty minutes figuring out how they could hook their boards together so they could sail and drift around the bay connected. Once they had completed the hook up they spent the rest of the time laughing and talking and helping each other sail their new board to a nearby pier. Their entire time was spent together, in cooperative activities, while the two boys spent their time in competition with each other.

An additional component of the young womens' aversion to competition also stemmed from their feelings that in many situations they did not possess the skills needed to play the game the way the other students wanted to play it. Because of their poor skill level they often reported that they were subjected to many negative comments from the

other students in the class. This may again relate to the Flow Model (Cskiszentmihaly, 1975), in which participants become anxious if their skills do not meet the challenges of the activity.

While listening to the young women it was apparent that when issues arose related to their physical prowess or lack of it, they often felt anxious or pressured.

> I really enjoy soccer as long as there is not a lot of pressure, I am not really good at it but I like playing and having a good time as long as people don't get mad if I miss the ball. (10-6-3)
>
> It is not like I didn't like playing on a team, it is just that I hated that feeling that you got when you were playing and the others were talking about you. They were making a fool out of me and I hated that feeling. (12X-2-17)

When given an opportunity to plan the ideal physical education program a group of grade ten girls offered an interesting insight, "in the best phys-ed program there would be no tension between anyone, it wouldn't be competitive. We would treat each other well, with no one judging anyone else" (10-6-17).

The question I often found myself wondering about was would the young women would feel differently if they had the skills to compete in the activity they were playing? One day after listening to two grade nine girls discuss how awful it was to miss the winning basket I asked them what it would feel like to score the winning basket. They replied,

Deserai: It would feel good inside.

Connie: I wouldn't be the one to score it, because all the other times I have been on teams. I have never felt like I was anyone special.

Deserai: Cause everyone was always better than you?

Connie: Yah. (9-1-10)

These feelings of not being skilled came up again with a group of grade ten girls. They told me of their experiences in a basketball unit.

Ali: The people who weren't so good tended to not touch the ball at all so the good people would always get it.

Megan: If you are playing basketball and someone throws the ball your way you step out of the way and hope that someone good is near you.

Ali: Or if you do get it you pass it right away so that someone else can make a basket.

Louise: Suppose you were right near the basket, and the ball came to you, would you shoot?

Megan: Yah, but I would be praying, Oh God, Oh God, please go in.

Josie: I would rather get rid of the ball so that someone else could get the basket.

Ali: If I was just hanging around with my friends I would shoot, but in phys-ed class I would pass it.

Megan: Let the athletic group shoot it.

Ali: Yah, they really got upset when we lost, they were really competitive. (10-10-26)

These feelings of being inadequate and being treated poorly because of their low skill levels are, I fear, one of the major reasons that young women drop out of physical education. During the first few minutes of my first conversations with grade eleven and grade twelve girls who had chosen not to take physical education, the issues of low skill levels and a dislike of competition were raised. Ronie stated that she felt intimidated because she was not as good as everyone else (11X-1-2). Heather and Eva explained that their decision not to take grade eleven or twelve physical education was an easy one because they found it too competitive (12X-1-1).

When asked how to relieve the high degree of competition in physical education many young women suggested that during physical education classes there should be two games or activities offered. One for the young women who wanted to play competitively and one for those who just wanted to have fun. This usually meant one area for the young women who were highly skilled and one area for those who were not. The importance of recognizing and accommodating differing skill levels was also mentioned by the young women in the pilot study,

Lauren: I think you should be able to pick your skill level and work from that level to improve, then people like me would have a chance.

Nina: That would be way better. They could have one level for the super sports people. You know the ones that are always running and stuff and one for the people like me, the ones who aren't so good.

Eva had an interesting response to the "problem" of competition,

> I think the only way you could get the competition out of there is to have the people that can play really well play their own game and the people who couldn't just go and play their own game. But when you do that sort of thing, it kind of means that the class can't work together and I think that they should be able to, it is just too bad that they can't. (12X-2-11)

Though Eva was able to offer a very viable solution to the problem she was still saddened by the fact that the class could not get along. Like so many of the other young women, Eva placed a great deal of importance on maintaining and nurturing relationships.

Fitness Tests are Not Fun

The most disliked and discussed activity was, without a doubt, the fitness tests. The fitness tests were far from fun. For the majority of the young women they were one of the most negative things about their experience in physical education classes. "So many people skipped the fitness tests. Like everyday if we had twenty in the class, on the day of the fitness run there would be just ten. People just hated that run" (12-1-12).

I frequently asked the young women why they thought they had to do the tests. Few of the grade nine girls were able to provide answers to this question. Pat, a grade eleven student provided the response that best captured the feelings of many of the young women in the other grades, "to realize what your ability is and what you need to do to get better. It

doesn't work though" (11-5-9). After listening to the young women, I would have to agree, it doesn't work. Fox and Biddle (1988) suggest "the premise that regular fitness testing stimulates youngsters to increase their exercise levels and improve their fitness, either in the short or long term has yet to be tested" (p.47). They go on to state that, "for the least fit children, (those in the most need of improvement) fitness testing has the potential to reduce exercise motivation" (p.47). These are important factors to consider if the aims and objectives of fitness tests are to motivate students to be active,

> When fitness testing comes around and you do the push-ups and sit-ups you go home and you think, you know I should be doing that regularly and then you think about how much pain it is and how much you hate it and then you just don't do it. The same with the run you just don't want to do it anymore. (10-6-10)

Unlike other schools in the district who used standardized norms to measure a student's performance, Murdoch's female physical education department encouraged the young women to set personal goals and evaluated the young women on how much they had improved from test to test. This was viewed positively by many of the young women. "I like the way our school does it, how we can set our own goals. They shouldn't put the good people up against the other people" (10-6-12). However this was the only bright spot in an activity that the majority of the young women dreaded.

When asked what photograph she would take that would capture her feelings about physical education, Mary who had stopped taking physical education after grade ten replied, "I would take a picture of a red face barfing in the toilet after my endurance run. That is all I can remember because it is supposed to make you healthy and everything and you just feel absolutely sick after it" (11X-2-8).

In addition to the endurance run the young women were also tested on push-ups, curl-ups (a type of sit-up), and sit and reach (a flexibility test). However, other then telling me how they or others would cheat on those tests so that they would always achieve their goals, these tests were seldom mentioned. The run was the source of the greatest dissatisfaction.

A key component of the fitness tests at Murdoch was that the teachers expected the young women to work out on their own time. The young women were instructed to outline a personal fitness program that would help them to achieve their goals. The teachers were available to help with the development of such a program. However, it was apparent that few of the young women worked out on their own; "no one practiced at home, they should know that we are not going to practice running" (11-5-3). Time and time again the running came up as the main area of concern about the tests,

Trina: The run was hell.

Cory: Fourteen minutes of hell.

Trina: One day my friend got so sick she almost passed out in the locker room. (11X -1-12)

Consistent with their desire to be active many young women told me that they knew that fitness was important but they just did not want to do the fitness tests. "I wish we could do step aerobics rather than fitness testing it is so much better than running laps in a circle" (10-3-15). "I think we should do all the activities and stuff but I don't think it should be forced on us, I think we should be able to do what we can handle and that is it" (11-3-18).

Many of the young women suggested activities they would rather do in physical education. These included, biking, power walking, aerobics, and step aerobics. Aerin had a suggestion that encompassed many of the previously discussed components of fun; "they need to make it fun, like make it a team and see how long the team can go. Go as long as you can go and then stop" (10-6-11).

The most poignant and disturbing comments came from the young women who had stopped taking physical education at the end of grade ten,

Terri: I do activity on my own but phys-ed didn't help me to be active.

Trina: I think it kind of worked the opposite way because they told us to do it and that was one of the reasons I wouldn't do it.

Yvonne: It made me think about not taking it at school and doing it on my own time cause no one pushed me and I could go my own pace. (11X-1-29)

Conclusion

The opportunity to listen to these young women discuss the physical education program as they have lived it was invaluable. Prior to this study I viewed physical education as a combination of parts. These parts included, the activities, the context, the students and the teachers. I knew that these parts were related but until now I don't think I really appreciated how interrelated they were.

I think the importance that the young women placed on fun showed this to me. I was so eager to dismiss fun as only a part of physical education. Yet to them it was the entire reason for participating in physical education classes. At first this was so difficult and almost distasteful to comprehend. However, I now feel that I know a great deal more about fun and it does not worry me as it did before. Fun is so much more than the frivolous almost mindless concept that many authors (Bean & Kinnear, 1989; Whitehead, (1988); Siedentop, Mand & Taggart, 1986) feel it is. I am inclined to agree with the work of Wankel and Sefton (1989) who conclude that a "positive fun experience in sport is dependent upon an organizational structure where skill development is emphasized, realistic challenges are provided, success defined largely in terms of personal skill mastery, and there is not excessive emphasis on winning" (p.364). I have learned that Dahlgren (1988) is very accurate when she states "there is ample evidence that one of the main reasons why individuals participate in any recreational activity is because they enjoy it - - in essence to have fun"

(p.16). The work of Griffin, Chandler, and Sariscany (1993) has much to offer as they encourage physical education teachers to reflect on the importance of fun in their programs and maintain that "if students have fun, then whether they see this as a process (having fun doing something) or as an outcome (satisfaction) is perhaps less important than they have positive feelings about physical education and physical activity" (p.65).

The young women have told and shown me that fun is about learning and skill development. Fun is being with friends and participating in new and different activities. But most of all fun is about being active. And isn't that what we as physical educators want for all our students? So what is so wrong with having fun? It truly is the most important thing!

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DREAM

Introduction

> I wish that everyone could go to phys-ed, do the best they can, have fun, and feel comfortable. I know that sounds like a dream, but I think that feeling comfortable is so important , if you don't feel comfortable you can't be yourself, you can't do as well. (12X-2-17)

Eva shared these feelings with me while sipping coffee on a cold rainy day in June. At the time we were not discussing wishes or dreams and I must admit that I was surprised to learn that a girl who so eagerly chose to leave physical education two years prior to our meeting would have a vision or dream of how physical education should be. I think I assumed that her thoughts and reflections did not go beyond my next question. I was so very wrong. Immediately after our meeting I listened to the tape of our conversation on my way home. I was struck by her words and found myself wondering how physical education had failed Eva and what could have been done differently.

I recall that I found myself thinking about my dream for physical education. I remembered being reminded yet again that because of my experiences, my dream may be quite different than Eva's. Feeling comfortable in physical education classes had most often come easy for

me. I had fun and almost always I felt like I belonged, that I was accepted. Thinking back I guess you could say that I felt comfortable. So comfortable that I chose to pursue a career that would allow me to spend my time in physical education. Yet Eva felt so uncomfortable that she left physical education as soon as she was able.

What about my dream for physical education? Did it include the emphasis on feeling comfortable that Eva's did? I do not think so. When I first heard Eva tell me of her dream I even wondered if I had a dream for physical education. I think the closest thing I had was what Dr. Myer Horowitz called my passion. I will always remember the morning in his class that I tangled with a high ranking official from Alberta Education. He saw no need for physical education and I could not see a school, or life for that matter, without numerous opportunities for physical activity. Yet to this day I am not sure that my passion included provisions for students to feel comfortable. I think that I may have been caught up in my constant struggle for the inclusion of physical education in the curriculum. I was and to some extent I still am, very concerned that students in elementary schools receive instruction in physical education for the recommended 150 minutes per week (Saskatchewan Education,1992).

But what is going on in these classes? Do the students feel comfortable there? I was once very involved in the Canadian Physical Education Association's Quality Daily Physical Education Program (Q.D.P.E.). The aim of this program is to encourage schools to offer physical education classes for students every day. Some have criticized

Q.D.P.E. because they feel it stresses daily before quality. Although I did not agree with these concerns when I first heard them I am now wondering if they are not correct. Perhaps our attention would be better focused on what is going on physical education classes rather than advocating more of them.

I am also very concerned about the high number of students, young women in particular, who do not continue to participate in physical education programs once they are no longer compulsory (Earl & Stennett, 1987; Fitness Canada, 1988; King, Robertson, & Warren, 1985; Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment; 1993). The young women in this study have led me to believe that perhaps one of the reasons secondary students leave physical education, is that they do not feel comfortable in the physical education environment. This desire to feel comfortable was not only evident in my discussions with the young women who had chosen not to continue to take physical education after grade ten, but was also evident with the young women who were currently enrolled in physical education classes from grades 9 to 12.

Similar to having fun, feeling comfortable is not just one thing. It is difficult to define and often means different things to different people. To the young women in the study however, feeling comfortable in physical education classes centered around their relationships with the other people in the physical education environment. This included the attitudes and behaviors of physical education teachers and the male and female classmates of the young women in the study.

I'd tell them . . .

The young women told many stories of the treatment they had received from teachers in physical education classes. These stories were both positive and negative. What was common was the profound impact a teacher's statement or behavior had made on almost all of the young women. There were few who did not have a story about an experience with a teacher. After a few weeks with the young women I realized that the students I taught at the university would greatly benefit from hearing their stories. So I began to ask the young women what they would tell these students about how they thought physical education should be taught. To facilitate this I asked them what they would say if I brought them into one of my classes at the university. The idea of having such an opportunity was met with much excitement. However, the prospect of talking to teachers in such a manner was so foreign to them that they often needed a place to start, so I frequently began with the phrase, "I'd tell them . . ." I let the young women fill in the rest. They had a great deal to say, as so much of their attitude toward physical education depended on their experiences with teachers.

It quickly became apparent that it is vital that students feel comfortable around their teacher. "I wish the teachers could have made me feel a little more comfortable being there" (12X-1-10). Camille, a grade nine student, explained that a teacher should "make your students feel comfortable around you" (9-9-35). Being comfortable around a teacher

tended to center around feeling that the teacher cared, understood, respected, and treated them in a fair and equitable manner.

I was surprised to learn that many of the young women wanted the teachers to be their friends, or at least they wanted them to be friendly, "a friendly teacher is a good teacher" (11-5-13). This surprised me as I often felt that high school students wanted the teachers to be separate from their friends. I guess I thought they wanted to establish themselves as individuals distinct from the adults in their lives. However, I was incorrect as numerous young women told me that their favorite teachers were their friends. While thinking about the best possible physical education class, Susan explained that the ideal teacher would "be like my friend, and I could tell her anything" (9-9-29). The other young women in her group agreed wholeheartedly.

A group of grade ten girls told me that their ideal teacher would be "more like us, not like a teacher. She would be more like a friend or something that way we would have more fun because she is more fun" (10-6-16). They felt that their present teacher was this type of teacher,

Aerin: She is the first person I would go to if I had a problem.

Marsha: Me too.

Aerin: She is an adult but you can still talk to her.

Emma: If you tell her that something is wrong with you, she really listens. Some teachers they look right through you. She knows who you really are.

Marsha: And also if you tell her something that is confidential she will keep it confidential. (10-6-16)

Carly, a grade eleven physical education student wanted to have a relationship with a teacher similar to those of the young women on the school teams,

> I don't know why they can't get personal with you. Like I know the sports teams are like that. Like the teams are more personal. I mean it doesn't hurt you to be like that in gym. I mean if you have a problem you should be able to go and talk to any teacher. It is nice to know that you have someone to talk to other than your school friends. (11-3-4)

I would have to agree with Carly. It has been my experience that the young women on the teams do enjoy a personal relationship with their coach. I was surprised however, to learn that Carly and many others also desired such a relationship. Yet when I consider the myriad of problems that adolescent girls face, I can understand this need. Repeatedly the young women seemed to be reaching out to teachers for someone that they could talk to, that would listen and possibly help them with their problems. Carly explained, "it is nice to have someone other than your school friends, someone to talk to about stuff that maybe your friends would not understand" (11-3-5).

The need to be understood was raised by many of the young women. They frequently mentioned that they wanted the teachers to try to "remember the problems that you had when you were our age" (9-9-35). The young women repeatedly said that they wanted the teachers to try to

understand what it is like to be a young woman in physical education, "they need to remember what it was like, you know, put yourself in someone else's shoes" (9-8-13). Unfortunately the stories of feeling misunderstood by teachers frequently outweighed the stories of being understood. This is not surprising as Chalmers (1992) suggests "physical education specialists are successful products of the system, they may have difficulty understanding the reluctant and negative approach of some of their students" (p.3). However, I think it is vital that teachers try to understand as I believe that a lack of understanding led many young women to leave physical education at the end of grade ten.

It was apparent that the young women wanted to be understood in two areas. The first involved being excused from physical education if they did not feel well and the second was the feeling of inadequacy they had if they did not have the skills to do an activity.

> I wish the teachers would be more understanding. I mean when you are not feeling good, and you have menstrual cramps and everything you are just not feeling good, you have no energy and you don't want to do anything and then they make you do stuff. I just think that they should be more understanding . . . if they only knew. (12X-2-21)

This issue of not understanding that sometimes the young women did not feel well enough to participate in physical education was raised repeatedly. "They don't understand that you don't feel well, you can be white and pale and still you have to participate" (11-5-12). Eva and Helen, two grade twelve girls who chose not to take physical education after

grade ten concluded that teachers, "need to be more compassionate about things. They need to be more understanding, like they just didn't seem to want to understand" (12X-1-14).

The second issue involved the young womens' feelings of inadequacy and frustration if they did not have the skills to participate in the activity. Young women at all grade levels raised this issue. Again they expressed a desire for the teachers to try to understand what it is like to not be good at an activity.

> Bonnie: I think they should be more understanding. I mean you could be trying your hardest and they will say that you are not even trying. And you are pushing yourself already. They don't understand because they are the people that can do better.
>
> Yvonne: It just comes natural to them. (11X-3-11)

Connie, a grade nine student stated, "if you feel uncomfortable doing a certain sport, like playing baseball cause you are afraid you are going to get hit by the ball, the teacher should try to understand" (9-8-13).

I think it is important to recall that in the previous chapter I discussed how much these young women wanted to learn and participate in physical education classes. Too often perhaps the fear of the ball or the perceived lack of effort are misunderstood by teachers as strategies students may be using to get out of physical activity. I think that prior to this study I probably thought that way. I may have even been the type of teacher that Zoe described, "both of our phys-ed teachers were really hard women. Their souls were hardened, they didn't seem to have feelings, I

didn't want to be like them" (11X-1-28). Perhaps in their zeal to encourage young women to be active, teachers become hardened to the feelings of their students, perhaps they did not or could not understand what it is like for many young women in physical education classes. Looking back on my past teaching experiences and thinking about my present work at the university, I think the words of Yvonne have a great deal to offer those of us interested in encouraging young women to be active, "I don't think you should be a physical education teacher if you can't understand what it is like to not be good" (11X-1-19).

After reading some of the comments of the young women in this study, Karen, a former high school physical education teacher commented, "It is almost as though we should take every physical education teacher and put them into a physical activity that they are not good at. Maybe then they would understand what it is like for so many of their students." After my time with the young women at Murdoch and thinking back to my experience in the step aerobics class, I would have to agree.

It is interesting to note that the young women in the pilot study frequently mentioned that their current physical education teacher (Ms. Neuman) was the best teacher they had ever had. They repeatedly told me that they felt this way because "she understands us." Delia explained, "she is so understanding, the first thing she did was get to know us. She really cares about us, she wanted to know what we want to accomplish." Vicki told me that Ms. Neuman "understands what it is like not to be good

at stuff, she is more of a friend than a teacher." The most poignant example of the effect Ms. Neuman had on her students was in the number of young women who told me that she had made the difference in their decision to continue to take physical education after grade ten.

Chalmers (1992) also found that the young women in her study valued a teacher who understood them,

> Encouragement, praise and help from their teachers' improved the respondents' self-concepts and increased their motivation to participate, thereby increasing their levels of participation and performance. Each teacher had particular ways of encouraging students. What was important for the students was that they felt understood which provided reassurance. The respondents appreciated the interest their teachers showed in them and valued individual attention and time taken just to talk with them. (pp. 4-5)

Closely related to the need to be understood was the desire expressed by many of the young women to be respected for who they were. This included their levels of skills, the shape of their bodies and their attitudes and behaviors. As I listened I realized that they were not asking to be allowed to be disrespectful to teachers or their classmates, nor did it appear that they wanted to break the rules in physical education, they simply wanted to be treated with respect. Stories of not being treated with respect most often came from the girls in grades eleven and twelve who had left physical education after grade ten. They had numerous examples of hurtful comments from teachers. Heidi and Yvonne shared two such stories,

> Well we were running and I was trying but I guess we were not running fast enough and the teacher said that if we didn't smoke we could run. And I didn't want to do high jump because I hate it and she said "oh you can't do it because you are too fat." She said it jokingly and stuff but she cuts you down. And you laugh it off, but if hurts. (11X-1-10)

> Well because I am husky, like I know that and the teacher she was by no means in perfect shape and she would always say, 'oh you should go on a diet' or 'maybe I should put you on a diet'. One day I just got mad and I said well maybe you should go on one too. I got in trouble, but I didn't care, I was so mad. (11X-3-19)

I was surprised to learn that all the young women in the study had experiences in physical education classes in which the students were permitted to pick the teams for games. Many of the young women told me that this happened all the time; "we have picked teams since kindergarten" (11X-1-24). As can be expected this practice was the cause for concern for many of the young women. Only two young women in the entire study told me that picking teams didn't bother them. Upon hearing this, Colleen a fellow group member remarked, "that is because you guys are always chosen first." If not picked, "you just sit there and you feel so bad" (11-5-6).

Many young women had feelings like Colleen's. Trina recalled, "it is so hard to be the last person standing there and then the teacher has to put you on a team and nobody will throw it to you because they think that you will miss" (11X-1-22). My heart went out to the young women who apparently did not have the skills needed to be respected and valued by their teachers or their classmates.

Morgan: Team picking is really bad because . . .

Karla: It is horrible, you are at the end and then it is OK, I have to take you.

Morgan: Yah, it is either you or that other person.

Ali: I was picked near the end all the time.

Morgan: I varied from the middle to the end.

Ali: I used to feel like, oh great, I guess I am really bad. The team doesn't really want you on the team.

Karla: Yah, I was left out there and now I am over here.

Morgan: I didn't really mind cause all my friends were picked near the end too, so we would end up on the same team. We would be like, who cares, we are not going to try anyway.

Josie: It was like someone saying to me that I was really bad at sports.

Louise: Were you ever picked near the front?

Ali: Yah, once when my friend was up there picking.

Josie: Once I was picked near the front and I was like, all right. Actually I really had fun during that game and it was soccer and I don't even really like soccer. I tried really hard after that.

Morgan: If you are on a team that doesn't want you, you can see it in their faces.

Ali: The teachers should organize the teams and they should do it quickly.

Morgan Then you can just get into the playing, and who cares. Then you don't have to stand there and wait.
(10-7-29)

Putting young women into situations in which they have to stand in front of their peers and wait to be chosen not only shows a lack of respect for them as people, but is also a cruel and totally unnecessary practice. Alexis, a student in the pilot study felt that "it is the teacher's responsibility to make the teams. They should know who is good and who isn't, we shouldn't have to stand there. I mean you just feel like crap, you just want to get out of there." Dodds (1986) concludes,

> Too few teachers give any thought to the feelings engendered by this practice (the choosing of teams by children for game play), especially in the children who are chosen last, those who die many deaths as they stand waiting, seemingly endlessly, for others to pick them in some relentless hierarchy. (p.141)

Later in my conversation with Morgan, Ali, Karla and Josie I asked them if they were taking physical education in grade eleven. Not one of them was. Josie explained that she is "taking a real class" (10-7-29). Ali said that she would like some of the activities but some of the stuff she wouldn't want to do again. I can't say that I blame her.

The issue of differential treatment of certain students by teachers was raised repeatedly by the young women in grades eleven and twelve who were no longer enrolled in physical education classes. A few of the young women in the other groups discussed the importance of not having favorites, but it was the young women who had left physical education who seemed to have the most to say about this issue. These young women told me that they wished the physical education teacher would treat

everyone equally. They had many stories of teachers paying more attention to the young women who were skilled and/or on the athletic teams. Lisa recalls,

> It was like they knew who the ones were that could do all the stuff, they were the really good athletes. They focused all their attention on them and for everybody else it was kind of like do your own thing, stay out of the way sort of thing. (12X-2-3)

There were many young women who agreed with Lisa. They felt that many physical education teachers were only interested in the young women who were skilled. "They give too much time to the people that are good and less time to the people who aren't good" (11X-1-16). This not only caused the young women concern it also puzzled many of them; "the thing I never really understood, is that they help the people who are already good instead of helping the people who aren't as good" (11X-1-7).

There is much research to indicate that teacher expectations influence teacher-student interactions (Good, 1987; Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982; Martinek, 1991). If a teacher spends more time with the students who are skilled it may indicate that the teacher holds low expectations for the students who are less skilled and thus spend less time with them because they do not feel that lower skilled students will benefit from their attention. "They spend more time like showing the good people how they can improve, when there are all these people who need a lot of improving but since they have no hope anyway they just stick with the good people" (12X-1-17).

Martinek (1991) reports that in physical education classes, teachers gave less praise to low expectancy students. Fewer dyadic contacts and more criticism were directed toward low expectancy students (p.66). Eva's experience is a good example of this,

> Like all the people who were not good at anything it seemed like they never got any attention. They never were helped and when they did do something it seems like they never got praised for it. I mean they never got to hear, "like oh that was a good job", or anything. But the other girls they were constantly being reminded, "oh you did super out there, you are great, you are great." Everybody else, nothing. I would have liked to have seen the teacher hand out the compliments to the ones that couldn't do as much. And maybe sometimes like smile at the person, not that you shouldn't smile, I mean all those other ones who are getting smiled at, maybe smile at someone else for a change. (12X-2-11)

Many of the young women longed for a teacher who "is equally fair to everybody. Somebody who treats everybody equally and not because that person is physically active or she is better then somebody else who doesn't like physical education" (9-8-11). Sonja, a very talented athlete, also stressed the need to treat students equally. "I would tell teachers to try and not have favorites and don't always use the same people to demonstrate. I know that must be hard not to have favorites but I just think they should pick different students" (12-3-18). Yvonne, a grade eleven girl who eagerly left physical education at the end of grade ten told me that physical education would have been much better for her if the teacher would have encouraged her. She felt that the teacher had an "attitude towards people who were good or not." She explained that "they

give too much time to the people who are good and less time to the people who are not good" (11X-1-16). It became apparent that so many of the young women seemed to be crying out for attention from physical education teachers. They wanted to be active, to learn and to enjoy their time in physical education classes. However, because of the way they were treated many felt ignored and unwanted. So they left in search of a class or an environment that was accepting of them and comfortable, definitely more comfortable than their experiences in physical education. Eva's feelings seem to capture the prevailing opinion of many of the young women,

> I'd tell them to be more understanding of us like to give us a chance you know. My teacher she didn't think that we could do it anymore. I just think that she should have given everybody else a chance instead of just knowing that some people can do it and she wanted them to be the ones. She should give everyone a chance to do it, I mean it may take these people more time but I think they probably could do it if you just gave them a chance. (12X-2-21)

The most universal examples of feeling uncomfortable in physical education classes occurred with male physical education teachers. All of the young women in the study had experiences in physical education classes taught by a male. Almost all had a male teacher in elementary school, usually in grade seven and/or eight, and the young women who were currently in grade twelve physical education were taught by a male. Regardless of the grade or their present involvement in physical education classes, few young women had many positive experiences with male

physical education teachers. Many of the issues that were previously discussed such as understanding, respect and equitable treatment were also raised in their discussions about male teachers.

It was interesting to learn that they did not think that male physical education teachers were as concerned about teaching as their female counterparts. Rhonda, a grade twelve girl presently in physical education, contrasted her experiences with male and female teachers,

> When you are doing a unit, Ms. Von (phys-ed teacher) will sit down and lecture to us and when we are outdoors she will explain everything to us. I know that kind of increased my mark. But Mr. Brown he is just like, "OK we are going to go out and do this, here is your sheet, and now we are going to go" . . . I liked the way Ms. Von did it because you could pick up more, you could think about it. She tells you what to do and how to do it, so then when you are doing it, like she teaches you. (12-1-7,8)

Many of the other young women had experiences in elementary school of not being taught how to do an activity,

> Marsha: I had never had a girl teach me phys-ed until high school, I think that is why I started to like it so much because it is so different with a girl teaching it was more one-on-one instead of "go and do this."
>
> Emma: Like in high school phys-ed you were really worth something, I mean they cared if you learned it. (10-6-23)

One day during my time at the school one of the male physical education teachers was scheduled to teach high jump to a class of grade nine girls. When the young women learned of this, they groaned and

many began to think of excuses why they couldn't take physical education that day. I did not observe the class, so in our next discussion I asked Deserai and Connie how the class had gone. They explained that it wasn't as bad as they thought it would be but they complained that he didn't teach them.

Deserai: He didn't explain things.

Connie: He would say go and jump the bar.

Louise: Is that what he said?

Deserai: Well no but that is what he is like, he'd say you have to do this and you have to do that. We would ask why can't you do this, he would say, just because. Like he would never really explain anything. (9-1-5)

The importance of being understood was again raised in discussions of male physical education teachers. The majority of the young women were convinced that a man would not understand why they may not be able to fully participate during their menstrual period, why they did not want to swim with the guys and how they felt when the boys made comments about their physical skills. I would have to conclude that the young women felt that a male teacher could not understand what it was like to be a girl in a physical education class. I frequently heard comments such as, "they don't understand because they are guys" (9-8-14). The girls in grade twelve were the only ones able to give an example of a situation in which they felt their male teacher did understand their

situation. What is interesting is that their experience was with Mr. Brown. These three young women were the only females in a class of 25 students.

Cindy: Like Mr. Brown is really understanding, like the day we were swimming and my friend caught up with me and it was that certain day, like he was really understanding. He never said anything about it.

Sonja: Yah, he didn't say, "oh yah like she can't swim." He is good that way. Like he doesn't say, "oh you girls can't do this, he says go show the guys that you can."

Cindy: He always wants us to show the guys that we can do things. Which is good because it shows that he had confidence in us. (12-4-19)

These young women were the only ones who felt that a male physical education teacher had felt and/or displayed confidence in their ability. Instead I heard numerous stories of male teachers having low expectations for young women and explicitly showing or telling them so.

> Our teacher in elementary school paid so much attention to the guys, he didn't expect anything of the girls, so why put any effort into it? He didn't teach us and he never cared if we got it or not. I never felt like asking anything, I mean it wasn't expected that we knew anything we had no tests, basically they just gave you a mark. (10-6-3)

Not only did male teachers hold low expectations for the young women in their classes they frequently displayed inequitable treatment of boys and girls. A recent Glamour magazine survey indicates that

respondents selected physical education, second only to math as a subject in which they had experienced a "teacher who was biased against females or paid more attention to the boys" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p.8). Many young women told me that they felt that it was almost as though the male teacher felt the need to show the boys that they were superior. This was evident with one teacher who would not let any girls referee intramural activities or games of younger students. "He said that the girls didn't know enough about basketball and volleyball. We were all on the senior teams but that didn't seem to matter" (10-1-17). Male teachers were frequently labeled as chauvinists, "he always favored the guys, he would say stuff like you guys are better so you go first" (11-5-6). "If you weren't good at football or anything like that, he was like one of the guys he would shut you out" (11X-1-7).

These experiences are similar to those of a participant in the research of Sadker and Sadker (1994),

> I had a sexist gym teacher last year. He was constantly putting down the girls in my gym class. He would say things like, "You" pointing to a girl, "Get out of the way! Mark actually is trying to make a basket." He hardly ever called the girls by name, and no matter how hard we tried he used to say we were lazy. (p.106)

The most blatant example of inequitable and disrespectful treatment by a male physical education teacher was offered by a group of grade ten girls. They vividly recounted an experience with their male physical education teacher that occurred at the beginning of their grade eight year,

Emma: He used to say to us in front of the guys, "if you have the monthly problem I could give a hoot." And all the guys would be on one side and all the girls on the other, like we used to mingle but he would push us apart, he made it clear from the first day that boys are better than girls.

Marsha: He would always have the guys right next to him, and then he would line us girls up and tell us he didn't want us to be whimps and he didn't want to see us crying and stuff. Then he would turn to the guys and say, "OK we are going to try to do some phys-ed here." He never said anything to them. He just tried to show us that guys are better than girls.

Aerin: He always compared us but in a bad way.

Marsha: He never had any consideration or thought towards girls. He always assumed that we didn't want to do anything. (10-6-22)

All of the young women in the study expressed relief that in grade nine and ten they were able to have a female physical education teacher. Up until that point, few if any had ever been taught physical education by a woman. I repeatedly asked the young women if, based on their experiences in elementary school, would they have chosen to take physical education in grade nine and ten. Few said that they would. One of the main reasons given was the way they were treated by male teachers and male students in senior elementary coeducational physical education classes. As one girl told me, "I was really scared of physical education in high school, I thought it was going to be even worse than elementary" (10-6-23).

Free At Last

For the young women in grades nine and ten, physical education was a place relatively free of their male peers. Although Murdoch had only one gym, the dividing door was seldom open. The only young women who experienced coeducational physical education in grades nine and ten were the grade ten girls who had participated in the pilot of Wellness Ten. For all other students in grades nine and ten the boys were seldom seen. The only exceptions to this were a seven class partner dance unit, one half day of swimming and an occasional low organizational game day necessitated by bad weather. Physical education in grades eleven and twelve at Murdoch was always taught in a coeducational setting. The girls and the boys were never separated for instruction although I frequently observed that during practice and game sessions they divided themselves into same sex groupings.

Whether physical education should be taught in same sex or mixed sex groupings has raised much discussion in the physical education literature (Browne, 1992; Griffin, 1989a, 1989b; Martinek, 1991; Scraton. 1992; Wright, 1993). This study has helped me to see that for the majority of the young women the milieu that is created when the boys are removed is not only desirable but essential if they are going to enjoy physical education.

The young women in grade nine and ten with whom I spoke were adamant that physical education during those grades not be taught in

coeducational classes. Many of these young women had not had positive experiences in upper elementary school physical education and were pleased and relieved to be free of the boys and experience an all girls environment. All girls in grade eleven and twelve also agreed that physical education in grades nine and ten should not be coeducational. One of the key points expressed was that in an all girls class they could relax and be themselves. They could be comfortable. It is important to note that not all of the young womens' experiences in all girls classes were entirely positive. The young women in grade eleven and twelve who had stopped taking physical education after grade ten did give examples of situations in which they were not treated well by their female classmates. However, a large majority of the young women in the study agreed that an all girls class was much better than a coeducational class.

The young women who chose to leave physical education after grade ten explained to me that they may have considered taking grade eleven physical education if it had not been coeducational. In their words, "it was the guys who probably drove us away from physical education" (11X-1-9). This is an interesting comment as many of the young women in this group had also been part of the Wellness Ten pilot which required a coeducational class for instruction. Thus, they had a very recent experience in coeducational physical education classes. On the other hand, the young women who had not participated in Wellness told me that their negative experiences with boys occurred in elementary school.

The young women currently enrolled in grade eleven and twelve physical education had mixed feelings about the presence of the boys in their physical education classes. The highly skilled young women often said they didn't mind having the boys around. Sonja, a very good athlete currently enrolled in grade twelve physical education told me, "in grade eleven and twelve you don't have to take it so if you are taking it obviously you don't mind and you know you can do the sports and you can compete with everyone else and you don't really care about who is watching you, but in grade nine and ten it is different" (12-1-3). However, many of the grade eleven girls longed for a return to the all girls class they left in grade nine and ten, or provision for units of activities in grade eleven and twelve in which the girls could be together. April's reason for this was similar to that of many of the other young women, "cause girls can just relate to each other easier and there is nobody cutting anyone down it is just all girls and you can just be yourself and you don't have to worry about what the guys are thinking or saying" (11-3-9).

So what is it about the presence of boys in physical education that caused so many of the young women to feel uncomfortable? This question was not difficult for the young women to answer. Their responses came quickly and were often filled with emotion. The comments and behaviors of the boys profoundly affected the young women' attitudes towards themselves and physical activity in general.

The most common complaint about coeducational physical education was that the boys often made comments that "cut them down,"

ridiculed and hurt them. When I asked Marcie why she did not feel comfortable in a coeducational class she replied, "well guys can be down right rude sometimes and they don't care if they hurt your feelings and some of the girls can't take that, they just can't laugh it off. It really hurts" (10-4-5). Griffin (1983) found that such comments, which she called "hassling" were the most frequently observed boy-girl interaction. She also determined that "boys limited the girls' opportunities to learn by hassling them" (p.83).

These disparaging remarks often included comments about their skill level and or their physical appearance. Trina told me that the photograph that would best capture her experiences in physical education would be "a picture of when you are playing a sport and the guy is yelling at you, like 'do you know how to catch a ball or are you just stupid' " (11X-2-9). Sonja took a picture of her class playing football and told me that she took it because, "the guys were saying smart assed remarks that girls can't throw a football" (12-4-4).

After a visit to a local fitness center Katie expressed a desire to have a separate weight room for girls and boys like the one she had just seen. Pat agreed because if a girl can't lift as much as a boy, "they would say, typical girl she can't lift weights" (11-5-14). Connie shared a story involving physical and verbal abuse,

> In volleyball I was getting ready to hit the ball and this guy behind me tripped me and so the ball hit me in the back of the neck and then he said, "you can't even hit it." The other guys said stuff like "why didn't you hit it?" and "did you see her she is so bad." (9-4-8)

It is not surprising to learn that comments such as these served to decrease the participation levels of young women in coeducational physical education classes. Emma's experience is a good example of this,

> At my school if you did something wrong in front of a guy they would get a group of their friends and they would all laugh at you it was like you didn't want to do anything just in case you did something wrong and they would start making fun of you because you are not participating, it was like you couldn't win. (10-6-4)

Connie recalled a classmate in grade eight who eventually stopped participating in physical education because of such comments. "If we were playing volleyball or something and she would miss the ball, they would all get mad at her. They would start saying things like 'you can't do anything, you can't play this, why do you have to play with us" (9-1-1).

During the pilot study I also heard stories of boys' behavior limiting the participation of girls in physical education classes.

> It got so bad last year that most of the girls in my class would not change for phys-ed anymore. There were only two of us left who ever took part in phys-ed. One day some of my friends in the class told me 'I feel like an idiot out there'. So I really tried to encourage them and I really tried to pass the ball to them, but they got intimidated when the boys would groan or roll their eyes if they missed a basket or a pass. After that, they didn't play anymore.

These experiences support the research of Griffin (1989c) who determined that in coeducational physical education classes,

> . . .boys often tend to dominate games, ignore female teammates and complain about participating with girls. Girls may hang back,

> intimidated by boys' harassment and aggressiveness or eventually lose interest and drop out, bored and discouraged. (p.25)

During a softball class, I witnessed the effects of these "hassling" comments. Pat, a grade eleven student, entered the gym eager to play. With glove in hand she excitedly announced that she was ready to go. Ms. Von told her that a game had started outside and she should head out to join the others. Off she went, only to return a few minutes later. She put her glove on the bench at the side of the gym and sat down. I approached her and asked her why she wasn't playing. She told me it was because of the guys, she just couldn't put up with their comments. I ventured outside and immediately saw that on each team there were two girls and ten to fifteen boys, there was no teacher present. The two young women were playing left field, the boys occupied all other positions.

Approximately twenty young women sat against the fence. I stood back and listened to the young women discuss why they were not playing. Emily, a young woman not in the study was very agitated as she told her friend beside her that because she could not throw and catch she was not going to play and make a fool of herself. "I can just hear what the guys would say. Who needs it?" In a few minutes the teacher arrived and chastised the young women for not playing. She told them to "go inside and do something." The young women eagerly headed inside and when I arrived a few minutes later they were playing basketball, badminton, and a unique version of indoor soccer (LJ-6-7).

Coeducational softball classes seemed to be the source of many disparaging comments. Rhonda recalled that during a softball unit in grade eleven she swung and missed the ball. One of the boys in her class remarked, "oh there is a girl for you" (12-2-11). In another situation, Sonja told me "if you swing and miss they sit there and laugh in the field or else just to be rude if a girl went up to bat they would sit down in the field, or say easy out" (12-2-12). Sadker and Sadker (1994) noted the recollections of a young woman,

> I went to school in the late 1980's. I never got to play a base during four years of high school physical education. The boys relegated the girls to the outfield because they said we made mistakes and the team wouldn't win. I think P.E. class was the most gender biased in high school. (p.126)

In addition, I learned that if the boys were to ever make a mistake, a double standard seemed to exist,

Sonja: Like if guys swing and miss, it is the stupid bat.

Cindy: They blame it on everyone but themselves.

Sonja: But if a girl does it then she can't hit. Or if they miss the ball well then the sun was in their eyes, even if it is cloudy out.

Rhonda: And then if you catch it they will say, "oh fluke." (12-2-12)

Sadly many of the young women told me that it is easier to just accept these comments. "Sometimes it is better to accept it rather than

make a big deal about it" (11X-2-24). Deserai was shocked when I asked her if she ever said anything to the boys, "no, because then they just cut you down even more." Griffin (1983) found that, "girls limited their abilities to learn by accepting boys' hassles. Rather than asking or demanding that boys stop, they usually tried to ignore the boys or moved to another event" (p. 83-84).

The day I observed the softball incident with Pat, a couple of young women from her class arrived late. I shared my observations with them and they told me that if they would have been Pat they would have stayed. April explained, "I think it is more embarrassing walking away because they are just going to talk about you and make fun of you and the next time you go to play they are just going to say well you didn't want to play last time, why do you want to play now?" (11-3-12). It became apparent that it is better to endure the comments when they are delivered; if you do not, they will only get worse.

In addition to boys commenting on their skill level, many young women gave example of situations in which they or their friends had to endure remarks about their bodies, "if there is a bigger girl running around the gym and they are running a little bit slow and the guys are dashing by thinking they are so good, then they say something like 'thump, thump, thump, there must be an earthquake' " (9-4-8). When one considers how insecure many of the young women felt about their appearance, it is easy to understand that these comments were often seen as more cruel than

any remarks about their ability. Unfortunately many of such comments were sexual in nature.

> The problem of sexual harassment (verbal, emotional and physical) is potentially intensified when dealing with activities which center on the physical. There is growing evidence that girls have to cope with severe harassment throughout their daily lives, especially in mixed settings in schools. (Scraton, 1992, p.92)

An example of sexual harassment is evident in a young woman's experience in a square dance activity,

> Well I was dancing with one guy and he started looking me up and down and saying "hmmmm" and then he did a lizard mouth. The guys are like really bold, they would take your shirt and like touch it right here (on the breast) and say "oh is this cotton or something like that" and they are touching you. (10-1-3,4)

Eva recalled a similar experience in grade ten physical education. "Guys are just pigs like if they are standing there and there is a group of girls doing jumping jacks they will sit there and say 'oh baby'. Then you have to do the jumping jacks and hold your boobs" (12X-1-4).

During my time at Murdoch I observed a cricket class in which Deserai seemed not to be enjoying herself. I found this strange as she had recently told me how much she enjoyed cricket. During a subsequent discussion she explained that in cricket she had to bend over to hit the ball and one of the boys had come out of the locker room and said, "Oooh look at her ass" (9-4-18). She didn't want to play after that.

The three grade twelve girls who were taking physical education had many examples of sexually offensive comments. After one of our meetings they encouraged me to come and observe their next physical education class to see for myself what they had to go through. The first thing that hit me when I began observing was how alone they were in the class. I knew that they were the only young women in a class of twenty five but I had never observed the class in action. I was struck by how vulnerable they seemed. I recall that they sat together and would have stayed as a group during the archery lesson had the teacher not split them up.

During the class a group of boys began to stare at me and laugh among themselves. I thought that I may have been imagining this so I decided to leave the gym for a while and return once the class was underway. Upon my return this same group of boys continued to stare and laugh. As I began to look away one of the boys deliberately faced me placed an arrow between his legs and began to rub his hand up and down the arrow. I turned away and the boys immediately broke into fits of laughter. I was appalled by this behavior and immediately looked to see if Mr. Brown had witnessed this, however he was on the other side of the gym with his back turned to the boys. At the end of the class I shared this experience with the young women and asked them if they thought I had misinterpreted the boy's actions. Sonja assured me that I had not been incorrect in my observation and was able to immediately tell me the boy's name because "he does that to me when I am in his group. When he goes

to get the arrow he always does that before he gives it to me" (12-2-2). As if that wasn't enough for that particular class, Cindy told me that I should have sat closer to the class, "because then you could have heard some of the things that they say. Like Mr. Brown has these nice little commands like 'knock your arrow at 90' ' and then Vince says to me 'knock her up at 90'.' Like they are so sick" (12-2-2).

Again I asked the young women if they would say anything to the boys about their comments. Sadly they told me that there was nothing they could do to stop the comments and if they said something, things would only get worse. These feelings are similar to those reported by Sadker and Sadker (1994), "Sensitive and insecure about their appearance, some girls are so intimidated they suffer in silence. Others fight back only to find this heightens the harassment. Many girls don't even realize they have a right to protest" (p.9).

Staton and Larkin (1993) posed an important question to the young women in their study, "If your school was declared a harassment free zone tomorrow, how would your life be different?" A young woman replied,

> One less worry, that's for sure. It would definitely be nice to go wherever you wanted and you didn't have to worry about stuff like that - someone would be hitting on you, flirting with you, making you feel uncomfortable. It would be nice to work or be in an environment that you felt comfortable in, instead of always having to worry about what was going to happen next -- or what to do. (p.21)

Many young women in physical education classes are crying out for such an environment. If they are going to be encouraged to participate in physical education classes it is imperative that physical education teachers take an active role in reducing the amount of harassment that occurs in physical education classes. We must do what we can to help young women feel comfortable.

In addition to experiencing the aforementioned verbal comments many of the young women shared stories of boys taking over numerous coeducational physical education activities. It became apparent that the boys were able to do this because they were more skilled or they assumed they were more skilled than the girls in the activity. Thus, they simply did not include them in the game or drill.

Nancy: The guys always scored all the time because they wouldn't throw it to the girls because they thought we couldn't catch.

Louise: So what are you doing while the guys are throwing the ball to each other?

Marsha: Standing there going like this (arms extended, waiting for the ball)

Aerin: Just waiting for the ball.

Emma: Then it comes to you and this guy zips in front of your face and he has the ball. (10-6-23)

It also became apparent that if a group of young women were participating in an activity by themselves the boys would often "overpower" them. There were numerous examples of this,

> Connie: If me and Deserai grabbed a football and started to throw out there right now . . .
>
> Deserai: The guys would join in and overpower us.
>
> Connie: The guys would say you can't throw the football that is not how you throw it. (9-3-15)

Although Connie and Deserai were speculating about what would happen, I think they were very accurate as Rhonda recalled a very similar incident that occurred during a grade twelve physical education class,

> We had a free period so the girls went outside to throw the football around and this guy just stood there and stared at me, just trying to bug me. He said something like, "you are a girl, you don't know how to throw a football". Our teacher was throwing with us so they could see that I did know how to throw a football. So they started coming into our game and running in front of us and taking the ball. I just kind of went, "OK whatever." (12-1-11)

During my work in the pilot study I heard many stories of boys "taking over" games,

> One time the boys were playing hockey and the girls were playing soccer on skates. About five guys didn't have sticks so they came and played soccer with us. After they joined our game maybe three girls touched the ball. They were speedo skaters and I can hardly skate at all, but I was trying and having fun before they came. But when they came they started to skate circles around us and we

> didn't get to play after that. They like to take over, they just automatically take over -- they keep the ball with them and then the girls don't want to play anymore.

Evans (1989) observed a basketball practice and a soccer lesson, and noted that the boys dominated the play,

> In the basketball practice for example, boys seemed to retain possession of the ball for a great deal of the time; a situation hardly surprising given that most were a good deal taller than most of the girls. Though they seemed no more able or knowledgeable about what they were doing than most of the girls, they were empowered merely by their physical presence and size to dominate the setting. (p.9)

> . . .despite all the efforts and ability which the girls had displayed during the skill practice situations, for the most part they were simply left out of the soccer game by the boys. (p.9)

After experiencing an all girls physical education class in grades nine and ten, April, a grade eleven student, longed for a return to such a situation as she felt that the girls would be more active.

April: Like if you are playing basketball or something and one girl goes off by herself to play when the guys come in they will push her off, and she will go.

Louise: Push her off?

April: Like if she is playing at the basket by herself and two guys come up and say that they want to play she would say 'well OK and just leave'.

Louise: Wouldn't she say, "I was here?"

April: I would stand up for myself, but there are too many shy girls.

Louise: Would most girls let the guys push them off?

April: Uh huh. (11-3-14)

I had seen this happen many times during my time at Murdoch. One such incident occurred at the end of the year. The girls' teacher was taking in locks and gave the girls the opportunity to use the gym for a free period. They enjoyed this a great deal, most of them choosing to play badminton and basketball. The boys class was outside playing softball. About half way through the period, some of the boys apparently bored with the softball game, began to straggle into the gym. The girls' teacher did not notice them as she was moving in between the girls' locker room and her office. Within a few minutes the boys had taken over the center of the gym, moving four badminton games and at least ten young women from their positions around the baskets. The young women were forced to the periphery of the gym where there was limited space and only a couple of baskets. I sat in amazement at the relative ease with which the boys exerted their dominance of the gymnasium. Most of the young women simply shrugged their shoulders and moved out of the way.

As many of them had been forced to give up their basketballs a few of them came and asked me if I could get them some more. I did so reluctantly. I wanted to tell them to go and assert themselves, to go and push the boys off, just as the boys had pushed them off. After all, the gym had been booked for them, the boys were supposed to be outside. However I did not, instead I gave them more balls and watched as they

played on the side of the main court. I recall that as I looked out onto the gym that day, the whole scene had changed. Within minutes about half as many young women were active and those that were still playing had to compromise their activity. No longer were they running full court after a pass, instead they crowded around one or two baskets. The badminton games were now crammed into narrow spaces at the side of the boys basketball game. So many young women had told me that in coeducational physical education classes they participated less, "the guys don't let you participate, they are always right in the middle. They shove you out of the way" (11X-2-13).

This physical domination of physical activities appears to begin at an early age,

> Every morning at recess in school yards across the country, boys fan out over the prime territory to play kick ball, football, or basketball. Sometimes girls join them, but more often it's an all-male ball game. In the typical schoolyard, the boys' area is ten times bigger than the girls'. Boys never ask if it is their right to take over the territory, and it is rarely questioned. Girls huddle along the sidelines, on the fringe, as if in a separate female annex. Recess becomes a spectator sport. (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p.60)

Numerous researchers (Bischoff, 1982; Griffin, 1989b; Kollen, 1983) have determined that in physical education classes, girls are in fact "shunted to the side as more aggressive students are allowed to dominate class games" (Griffin, 1989b, p.227). Griffin (1989a) concludes,

> In classes where game play predominates and instruction is minimal, the experienced, aggressive and talented students flourish at the expense of their classmates. When class norms allow name calling, verbal harassment, or poor sport behavior to go unchallenged, students learn to defend themselves by either attacking classmates first, choosing only "safe" activities, or withdrawing from participation altogether. (p.20)

On the sidelines. Not only had the boys pushed the young women there, they seemed to understand and accept it. It was almost as though it was easier to let the boys control the activity, than to question why it was happening. Perhaps the young women did not question it because they had come to expect and accept it. The comments and behaviors of boys led many of the girls in this study to conclude that the boys controlled the physical education environment. These feelings are supported by Oldenhove (1990) who believes that because so many girls have limited access to equipment and space, and have had to endure harassing comments about their bodies and their physical skills, their confidence is greatly undermined. This leads many to conclude that physical education is more important for boys. One day Cindy remarked, "it seems like everything in phys-ed is made for guys" (12-2-10).

To a girl who has been constantly reminded that she is not skilled enough or her body is not athletic enough it must indeed seem that everything in physical education is made for the boys. I heard and observed many examples of males controlling much of what goes on in the physical education environment. This control and dominance is not only evident in the actions and behaviors of boys and men it is also

evident in the physical environment of the school and the gymnasium. At Murdoch for example, the gym is surrounded by posters of male basketball players, all in preparation for a huge annual boys basketball tournament. The pictures in the hall outside of the gym are of the winners of this tournament and the wall of fame which honors past Murdoch athletes has one picture of a female, her accomplishments dating back to the 1940's. Even the majority of pictures in the girls' physical education office are of males in action. A series of Russell posters encouraging students to earn a high school diploma were posted in both offices, locker rooms and around the gym. They all depicted male athletes. Eisner (1991) suggests that " . . . how books are written, how buildings are designed, how classrooms are organized tell us as much about how people are supposed to behave and what they are supposed to learn as anything else can" (p.33).

These visual images coupled with the attitudes and behaviors of some male teachers and students may serve to make many young women feel as if they do not belong in the physical education environment. If we want to encourage more young women to be physically active I feel that the presentation of material such as this must change. The Canadian Association for Physical Education and Recreation (1994) recommends,

> Equipment should reflect equal value placed on female and male participation. The predominance of male illustrations within texts and other school/media resources fosters negative attitudes about females in physical activity and sport. Unbalanced depiction and/ or omission of females within these resources influences decisions to participate. (p.7)

It is also recommended that teachers "check through materials to ensure that there is an equal portrayal of female and male contributions to athletic endeavors; ensure that school bulletins, notice boards, newspapers, displays and demonstrations are gender equitable" (p.7).

Conclusion

As a physical educator I do not think we should be surprised by the fact that so many young women want to experience physical education in an all girls class. However, it is important to note that simply grouping young women together will not guarantee a positive experience. As they repeatedly reminded me, they need to feel comfortable in physical education classes. They need a teacher who will care enough about them to understand, respect and teach them. They need teachers who value all students regardless of their abilities and expect their students to do the same. They need to be with classmates who will not ridicule them, who will include them and help them to feel like they belong. They need to be given a chance to experience the joy of movement that so many active people know and love. As Eva reminded me on that rainy day in June, they need to feel comfortable. Similar to Eva, I know this must sound like a dream, but I think that the future of young women in physical education depends on whether or not physical educators at all levels are willing to listen and pursue such a dream.

CHAPTER FIVE

A ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY

Introduction

A few weeks ago, after reading some of my writing, my critical friend asked me a question that over the past few months had been nagging at me. As I had been working hard to get my research finished I had managed to put this question in the back of my mind. However she brought it back into view when, holding up a copy of one of the themes I had written she asked, "How are you going to get this out?"

Her words were so fitting as we were sitting in her second floor office at the university and from her window I could only see the trees and the clear blue prairie sky. I recalled being reminded yet again of how isolated we are "up here". How safe and removed from the day to day workings of schools. She was asking a question about research that I had often longed to ask my university colleagues. I call it the "now what" question, meaning, now that you have found this out, what will you do? How will you share it with those who are in daily contact with the people you observed or tested?

During my first year of teaching at the university I actually once asked two internationally acclaimed professors the "now what" question. Later at a reception for the professors I was chastised by a senior faculty

member for doing so. It seemed that this question was not to be posed to university researchers. I was surprised but I had learned my lesson. How comfortable for "us" I thought.

Seeing my blank stare and snapping me out of my reminiscing my critical friend decided to try again. She gestured to the window and said, "You know, how are you going to get all this information out? What are you going to tell the people out there about what you have learned?"

More silence. It was the dreaded "now what" question. I found myself trying to find the right words. I knew that there was much I wanted to say but I was not sure where to begin. She added to my dilemma with the news that she had recently given my name to a recreation consultant in a nearby city. This center had just been awarded a large grant of which a significant portion was to go towards developing and implementing a plan that would strive to increase the number of adolescent girls involved in physical activity. "I told them that you would be the one to talk to since you have just done this study" she explained. So now it was me that had to answer the "now what" question. What an uncomfortable feeling.

What should I say to this person, to my committee, to my students, to my colleagues? Am I now the expert? I think not. However, I have researched this topic, and I have had the privilege of spending almost three months with young women. I know that it is not unreasonable for others to expect me to have some answers. I think that this is what worries me. I am not sure that I have the answers, or any answers for that matter.

These feelings have caused me concern and yet I recall the day when Dr. Claudette Tardiff, the Associate Dean of the Faculty of the College St. Jean, visited one of the graduate classes I was taking. She explained that upon the completion of her doctoral work she was aware that she had more confidence but was much less nonchalant than when she had began her research. She told us, "I realized that I didn't have all the answers." I remember that at the time this surprised me, but now I find her words very comforting.

Like Dr. Tardiff, I too feel more confident in my knowledge and understanding of young women and physical education. But I do not have the answers. After doing research of this type I feel I have a much better understanding of what Eisner (1991) meant when he stated,

> In qualitative case studies the researcher can generalize, but it is more likely that readers will determine whether the research findings fit the situation in which they will work. The researcher might say something like this "This is what I did and this is what I think it means. Does it have any bearing on your situation? If it does and if your situation is troublesome or problematic, how did it get that way and what can be done to improve it?" (p.204)

Will these findings have a bearing on other situations? I am not sure because as Eisner (1991) explains this will depend on the specifics of other situations. I can however offer some ideas and suggestions that may help all of us who are interested in moving young women from the sidelines a little closer to the action. Answers to the "now what" question? Perhaps.

I'm Listening

> This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. How often in the three years left in high school or even when we were in elementary are you going to have someone come to your school to actually find out what you think? You know it is usually them telling you what you should be thinking and doing, they never ask you. (9-8-16)

Deserai's words have never left me as I worked on this project. I can still recall the day when she made this statement. It was June and I was nearing the end of my time at Murdoch. Deserai and her good friend Connie had just finished asking me if I had learned anything by talking to them. I sensed that although we had been together for almost three months they were still finding it difficult to believe that someone was willing to listen to them, and that their experiences and feelings were both interesting and meaningful.

I tried to reassure them that I had learned so much from them and all of the young women in the study but I had trouble articulating how much the time with these two young women and the others in the study had meant to me; how much I had learned and how much I had changed. Listening to me struggle to find the words, Deserai decided to "help me" by telling me about her experiences in the study. It was then that she blurted out her once in a lifetime statement. Her friend Connie agreed and exclaimed "it was so cool that someone wanted to listen to us and find out our opinions" (9-8-17). I recall being both relieved and flattered that they felt that all the time we had spent together had been worthwhile.

Nieto (1992) in a case study of students who have dropped out of school reported that, "Educational researchers, teachers, and policy makers have all had their say in what causes school achievement or failure. The voices of students are rarely heard in the heated debate surrounding school failure and success" (p.5). It has been my experience that a similar situation exists in physical education; the voices of students in this case young women, are seldom heard. Instead the "experts": curriculum writers, consultants, administrators, teachers and university professors decide what will happen to young women in physical education classes. This is clearly evident in the recent development and implementation of the first physical education curriculum initiative in Saskatchewan in almost twenty years, Wellness Ten. Although many teachers and advisory committee members stressed to the curriculum writers and their superiors the need for student input and evaluation, this was never done. The students were never given a voice.

I found this very frustrating and after doing research of this type I find it disheartening. I am concerned about the numbers of evaluation reports of curriculum documents and assorted research papers associated with the teaching of physical education that ignore the voices of students. This is something that I would like to suggest must stop. If not, I fear that we will continue to lose many students, particularly young women to the sidelines of physical activity.

What happens if we give young women a voice in the design and implementation of physical education programs? During my time at

Murdoch, I learned that young women have much to tell someone who is ready to listen. Eisner's (1991) comments rang true for me. "It is surprising how much people are willing to say to those whom they believe are really willing to listen" (p.183). I was willing to listen but it was not easy. I found myself wanting to question them, to doubt their stories, to interrupt them and give them all sorts of reasons as to why things are the way they are in physical education. This experience is similar to Ripley's (1991),

> . . .when I began my search for the meaning of growth, I assumed to find meanings that were similar to mine. I did not, and in the process learned to diminish my tendency to project my own views of the world on to others; to let go of my assumptions that most people saw the world in ways similar to mine; and to empty of these preconceptions if I truly wanted to listen to and to understand another human being more deeply. (p.330)

On most occasions I resisted the urge to, in Deserai's words, "tell them what to do and what to think." So I listened and the more I listened the more I learned. I soon realized that I did not have the answers I thought I had. I had so much to learn, and I could only learn if I listened. Kostash (1987) noted that the young women in her research talked to her because they knew she was taking them seriously, ". . .listening carefully, asking questions, responding with genuine interest -- and that although I was an adult (and therefore 'smarter' about some things then their girlfriends), I had no authority over them. They could disclose things without impunity . . ." (p.9).

In my work I too took the young women seriously. This helped me to understand what it was like for these young women in physical education. It was critical that I respected their feelings and truly listened. In doing this, I was fortunate to be able to achieve what Locke (1989) described, "I cultivated some participants who became both friends and collaborators, sharing information not otherwise available to outsiders" (p.4). Although I had taught physical education to young women for ten years, I quickly realized that I was, in a way, an outsider. I might have known something about physical education, but I learned that I really didn't know much about the young women as individuals, as people. This is reflected in an early entry in my journal. At the time of writing, I had talked to all of the young women in the study once,

> I sit and look at the class differently now. It is not simply another physical education lesson. I now see them. I find myself wondering how do they feel? What is important to them? What is bothering them today? Things like that. I am drawn to their faces, and the lives that lie behind the smiles. They are no longer just a group of young women but a collection or grouping of individuals -- this is frightening to me. Did I see them like this when I was teaching them, when I saw them at least two or three times a week? I don't think so, yet I see them that way now. (LJ-5-12)

During that same class my attention was drawn to a particular young woman,

> A young woman stands a few feet away from me, smiling when I do. The game is almost over and she has not yet touched the ball. She watches me and I watch her. At last the ball comes to her, she picks it up and throws it in, she smiles at me, I smile back. The

> batting team is out, my young woman walks slowly in, twirling her stick. She is not in the study, but at the end of the class she approaches me and asks if it is too late to join. I tell her she is welcome at any time. All this from a smile. I wonder how many are like her, needing some attention, a smile, waiting for someone to pay attention, to listen. (LJ-5-12)

What happens when you give young women a voice? When you invite them in to the closed circle of adults who make decisions about their daily lives? At first I don't think that many of them believe that they could ever have such an opportunity. Many are like Deserai and Connie, genuinely surprised to learn that someone will listen to what they have to say. However, when you take them seriously and listen they really do have so much to offer. I recall the silence that often came after I asked a group of young women what they would say to the university students I teach about teaching young women physical education. I would often taunt them and say "oh so you would have nothing to say" which was always met with much denial. They truly did have something to say, they just weren't used to being asked!

There were many young women who, like Deserai and Connie, had spent countless hours with me and still doubted if anyone would listen to them. I can't blame them. I taught for almost ten years and only have one recollection of sitting down with my students and soliciting their opinions about any aspect of the physical education program.

Why are we reluctant to ask and to listen? Perhaps it is because many of us, myself included, really wonder if our students have anything to

say. I have learned differently, but I think there are many teachers like my friend Ray.

I met Ray downtown one day after just beginning my doctoral work. He asked me about life in Edmonton and I can recall excitedly telling him that I had decided to research the experience of young women in physical education classes for my thesis. Upon hearing my idea he laughed and replied, "After teaching physical education all these years Louise, you have to do a Ph.D to figure that out? It will be a pretty short thesis. Girls don't want to do anything in physical education. End of story." I remember that I laughed too, more out of embarrassment and fear than humor. I walked away doubting myself and wondering if he was right. I recall thinking that perhaps young women did not have anything to say about their experiences in physical education classes, maybe they just didn't want to do anything.

Because of my experiences at Murdoch I now feel that there are so many things about the experiences of young women in physical education that many teachers do not know. I have learned that young women have so much to say about physical education to someone who will listen. I cannot fault my friend for his feelings I am sure that there were many days when I was teaching that I felt the same way. It really did seem that young women did not want to do anything. Of course what I have learned is that there are many reasons for their apparent inactivity. So many young women have a great deal to say, but we have to be willing to listen.

One of my most uncomfortable moments at Murdoch occurred during one of my last meetings with a group of grade nine girls. At the end of the previous session we had been discussing the ideal physical education class and the ideal physical education teacher. As these young women spent a great deal of time together I asked them to think about these things before our next meeting. At the beginning of the following session the young women came in and told me that they had been thinking about our previous discussion and that they had something to tell me. It seemed that they had decided that I would be the ideal physical education teacher because "you listen, you care, and you are really nice, we could tell you anything." I tried to explain to them that I don't think I was like that when I taught, but if I was to teach again that I would try to be like that.

This answer seemed to satisfy them but it far from satisfied me. I know that in all the years I had taught I had never listened to the voices of students like I did during those months. Perhaps it is unrealistic to ask any teacher to listen like I did. I mean who has the time? What I am suggesting is that we all try to listen a little more. I think that everyone would benefit greatly.

I'll Try To Understand

"I'd tell them (teachers) to try to understand what it is like to be a girl in phys-ed." I often heard feelings like this during my time at Murdoch.

For me . . . I think that I am just beginning to understand. As I have said so many times before, I know that the majority of the young women with whom I spoke did not experience physical education as I did or as, no doubt, the majority of physical education teachers did. It is difficult for those of us who have confidence in our physical abilities to truly understand what it must be like to be constantly faced with tasks and situations that are both beyond our abilities and confidence. I think it is vital that physical education teachers try to understand.

van Manen (1991) identifies this need to listen and understand as pedagogical understanding. He explains, "Pedagogical understanding is sensitive listening and understanding . . .What could be more important than to have a sense of what things are like for a particular child . . .?" (p.83). A key component of pedagogical understanding is "the ability to perceive and listen to children" (p84).

If physical educators at all levels take the time to listen and understand it may be possible for them to achieve "pedagogical understanding." Such an understanding may permit them to critically look at the activities, and milieu that currently exist in many young womens' physical education programs. Based on the feelings and experiences that the young women shared with me, I think that we all need to listen and then ask ourselves, "if I felt like that, what would this situation be like for me?"

I am reminded of the genuine fear and concern that was expressed by so many young women about having to shower and change in front of

their peers or be around boys in their bathing suits. I think of the painful question of so many of the young women who left physical education as soon as they could, "Why does the teacher spend so much time with the people who are already good?" I smile when I think of Ray's words and how they contrast with the feelings and experiences of so many young women who expressed a sincere desire to be physically active.

I worry about how many young women wanted the teacher to be their friend, someone that they could talk to, who would listen. I am haunted by Connie's words. "With you I had someone to talk to, someone who listens. I mean really listens. Everybody ignores me" (9-7-3). I was the one who listened, and I was in and out of her life in three months. What of the people who have daily contact with her? How many young women needed me to listen when I was their physical education teacher? How many did I fail?

This type of understanding takes time and it also asks all of us involved with young women to look behind the smile to the story that she is living. If we can hear her story, her side, the way things look to her, then we can begin to understand. It is my hope that this understanding will move us to action.

And Now . . .

I do not think that one can truly listen and understand without being moved to some type of action. Based on my experiences with the young

women at Murdoch, I would encourage all those involved in the design and implementation of physical education programs for young women to consider the following recommendations.

1. Young women need to have opportunities for input into the programs in which they are participating. They should be asked what they like and what they dislike. If they are not participating they may have very good reasons for not doing so. I have learned that young women look to physical education as an opportunity to learn, to be active, to be with friends and to have fun. I believe that it is imperative that physical education curricula be designed to meet these desires. If physical education programs can meet these needs we may encourage more young women to lead physically active lifestyles.

For example, I have learned that many young women are bored by the repetition of activities such as volleyball, and basketball from one year to the next. A critical review of existing physical education curricula is essential if the needs and wishes of young women are to be met. We need to explore the reasons for the domination of traditional team sports in many existing physical education programs. Too often these sports are included because they help to feed and promote the extra curricular athletic program. Although this program is an integral part of the physical education program it should not be allowed to dictate the activities that comprise the instructional physical education curriculum. For many physical educators this will be a bitter pill to swallow. Not only are they the

ones who excelled in many of the activities that young women are critical of, they may also feel unprepared to teach alternative activities. Thus the need for teacher inservice and support are essential if any meaningful change to existing physical education curricula is to be achieved. In addition the activities that comprise the fitness component of many existing physical education programs should be reviewed. I have learned that personal fitness is important to many young women however many do not wish to jog or run to attain and maintain cardiovascular fitness. Instead they desire alternate activities such as step aerobics, bike riding, walking and hiking.

Young women frequently complained about the lack of instruction and learning opportunities in physical education classes. Many wanted to improve their physical skills; they are aware that in doing so they will increase their opportunities to be active. This finding is supported by Dahlgren (1988) who states that, "many girls do not possess the full range of basic motor skills and, consequently, cannot acquire a wide repertoire of specific skills with which to enjoy participation in many forms of physical activity" (p.29).

I would suggest that a variety of instructional approaches be used when teaching young women. In particular I would caution physical education teachers about the emphasis they may be placing on competition. Many young women told me that they are turned off physical activity due to the high degree of competition that they perceive exists in physical education classes. For a young woman worried about her body

and intensely aware of all of it's shortcomings, having to measure up to others or a certain standard of performance is often unbearable. In addition, many young women place a high degree of importance on the interpersonal relationships that occur in physical education classes. To them, participating in competitive activities puts such relationships in jeopardy. These findings are supported in the recently released Women in Sport National Awareness and Attitude Study.

> As well as confirming the long-held hypothesis that girls participate in sport for fun, the study notes the importance both of fitness and the social experience that physical activity provides. Not for them the male model personified by the quest for victory. (Angus Reid, 1993, p.1)

Teaching strategies such as cooperative learning and reciprocal teaching may work well as they can achieve a goal of learning skills in a non-competitive atmosphere. In addition, both of these strategies permit students to interact with their peers. Individualized instruction is also suggested as this may alleviate the stress that so many young women feel when asked to attain goals or skills which they feel are beyond their physical capabilities.

If our goal as physical educators is to encourage all of our students to pursue a lifetime of physical activity then it is our responsibility to design programs which will offer young women many opportunities in which to develop the skills and attitudes needed to be active. We may not want to hear the voices of young women, as they may raise many issues with which we may be uncomfortable. However, I strongly believe that until we

listen and work with young women to improve their experience in physical education, the high numbers of young women who drop out of physical education programs will continue to plague us.

2. Many young women have a negative body image. Body image is "the picture she has of her body - - what it looks like in the mirror and what she thinks it looks like to others" (Edwards, 1993, p. 15). A recent study of young women conducted by the Canadian Teachers Federation reported that 67% of the respondents stated that their body image was a major concern (1990). It is important to note that body image plays a critical role in the formation of self concept; how a young woman feels about herself.

I have learned that a negative body image greatly affects the self esteem of young women and this affects the participation of young women in physical activity. Physical education classes frequently put young women in situations in which their bodies are exposed to others. For a young woman who does not feel comfortable with her body, such situations can often be devastating. The wearing of physical education uniforms or in some classes bathing suits or leotards, changing in front of others, and showering after classes are examples of uncomfortable situations for young women.

I believe that it is imperative that physical educators be sensitive to this and whenever possible make physical education classes a place where young women can feel comfortable with their bodies. I would

suggest that young women be permitted to choose the clothes they wish to wear in physical education; this includes the provision for sweat suits if that is what a young woman chooses. Locker rooms should have many private enclosed places for young women to change and shower. Hill and Brackenridge (1989) support of the importance of the development of a positive body image in physical education classes, and suggest,

> . . .it must be necessary to allow children to choose how they dress in physical education lessons otherwise the risk of false self presentation, and embarrassment may damage self confidence, particularly during menstruation and puberty. Similarly they must be allowed to decide for themselves when they need to shower. Allowing children to be self responsible in this way would encourage self esteem and help negate some of their fears. (p.154)

I would also encourage all physical educators to review and reexamine the emphasis placed on weight loss through the teaching of fitness and nutrition. Dahlgren (1988) determined that "physical activity for girls is often promoted on the basis of 'negative issues' (such as weight control) rather than in terms of the value of physical activity for its own sake" (p.27). Edwards (1993) suggests that, " . . .the trend toward ultra thinness may be reinforced in fitness advertising and by instructors who overemphasize weight control through exercise" (p.16). I am concerned that physical education teachers in their zeal to advocate physical activity and good eating habits may be contributing to the anxiety many young women feel about their bodies. Such anxieties may be manifested in eating disorders. Ross (1988) advises physical educators to be careful

when they advise students regarding exercise and dieting. He notes that ". . . activity anorexia is most likely to occur in families, social groups, or organizations that encourage both high-rate activity and dieting practices" (p. 41). As physical educators are aware, there are many reasons to be physically active and eat properly. I am concerned however, that many young women are only hearing a weight loss message.

I would also suggest that teachers develop lessons and units of instruction that confront the presence and effects of a negative body image. In many cases this will involve discussions around the importance that our society places on women of all ages being thin, and how this greatly affects the actions and behaviors of young women. Young women need to be encouraged to accept a wide range of healthy body weights and shapes, to love their bodies the way they are and to reject social pressures to conform to an unrealistic body size (Edwards, 1993). "We need to teach girls that beauty comes in different sizes, shapes and colors, and that a beautiful body is a healthy, strong one" (Girls Incorporated, 1993, p.4). If physical educators can help young women develop a positive body image, they may be much more likely to pursue physical activity throughout their lives (Borys et. al., 1990, p.27).

3. Young women place a great deal of importance on the milieu or environment in which physical education occurs. They repeatedly told me that they need to feel comfortable in physical education. As so many of them have little confidence in their bodies and their physical skills they

need situations in which they will feel respected and valued. Borys et. al. (1990) emphasize that "In a milieu of respect for and acceptance of individual differences learners can be outgoing instead of being withdrawn" (p.17). Such a milieu can only be created if the actions of both students and teachers are consistent with a goal of respect for, and acceptance of others.

I have learned from the young women in this study that such an environment rarely exists in coeducational physical education classes. I repeatedly heard stories of boys ridiculing, harassing and excluding young women in coeducational physical education classes. As physical educators, I do not think that we want to put young women in situations in which they feel uncomfortable. Instead we should be striving to offer situations in which young women feel comfortable; situations in which they want to participate and be active. Our goal should be to create an environment that gives young women many opportunities to learn, experience and feel confident with what their bodies can do. I agree with Chandler (1980) who suggests that the most important goal of a physical education program for young women is that they develop, "a sense of value of their own bodies. If physical education is taught with this in mind, young women can appreciate its importance, they can develop a healthy relationship with their bodies that has been so lacking in our culture" (p.121).

I am not certain that such goals can be achieved in coeducational physical education classes. I know that segregating classes by sex is

often difficult to do from a time tabling standpoint; I am also aware that in some smaller schools this may be impossible. However, I believe that there is a much greater chance of providing a comfortable, accepting, and respectful environment in physical education classes that are not coeducational. I have learned that such an environment is essential if we want to keep young women involved in physical activity.

If physical education classes must be coeducational, then I encourage the teachers of these classes to design and implement programs which address many of the concerns expressed by the young women in this study. This may mean that the young women in the class are given options and opportunities that differ from the young men in the same class. Talbot (1989) encourages physical education teachers to offer programs that recognize that "people differ in their capacities, interests, resources and various experiences" (p.13). In addition, teachers in coeducational classes must take an active role in monitoring the interactions between the males and females in their classes. They must clearly indicate that harassing, disrespectful comments will not be tolerated and they must model behaviors that demonstrate that they respect and value all of their students.

An example of a program that meets many of the above recommendations is found in the Moonta Area School Project. This project, initiated in a school in Australia, was developed to address the high number of senior girls who were dropping out of physical education. The aim was "to enable girls to grow in skills and knowledge and develop

a more positive self image, leading to increased self confidence" (Curriculum Development Centre, 1988, p.65). The program was taught in a single sex class and included activities such as yoga, aerobics, discussions about diet, exercise and obesity, and the organization of a daily exercise program. The emphasis was on participation rather than the pursuit of excellence. Some of the outcomes of this program included, a wider range of activity options for girls, highly motivated students who frequently started the lesson without the teacher, and a significant change in the attitude of the girls to each other resulting in the development of cohesive support groups. An exciting feature of this project was that it was able to motivate the young women to continue to participate in physical activity, "Many of the girls became involved in community fitness classes or sports clubs after the program" (Curriculum Development Centre, 1985, p.66).

Closely related to offering alternative, relevant programs in an attractive environment, is the need to examine the attitudes and expectations that physical education teachers hold about young women and physical activity. Many of the young women in this study expressed the feeling that because of their low skill and confidence levels, physical education teachers did not pay attention to them in their physical education classes. Many young women told me that their physical education teachers spent all of their time with the students who were "already good." The importance of having high expectations for all students is emphasized by Borys et. al (1990),

> Preconceived notions that are based on gender, intelligence, race or physical disability, about the potential for development of motor skills, can lead to lowered expectations that ultimately set artificially low ceilings for aspirations. On the other hand, the expectation that all individuals can become more competent, given appropriate instruction, encouragement and practice, can lead to increased expectations and high levels of achievements. (p.15)

I believe that as teachers we must be willing to teach students of all ability levels. Teachers may be unaware that due to their actions they may be further excluding these young women from physical activity. To increase their awareness I would strongly suggest that teachers reflect upon their own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors towards young women in physical education, and if possible participate in inservice opportunities such as the Canadian Association for Health and Physical Education's Gender Equity Workshop. This workshop is designed to raise awareness about the experiences of young women in physical activity settings. Participants are also encouraged to develop strategies which will encourage more young women to be involved in physical education programs.

It is imperative that these recommendations be considered by both teachers and administrators presently working with young women in physical education programs, and professors and students involved in physical education teacher education classes. If these novice and experienced professionals are willing to recognize the need to listen to, and address the concerns of, young women in physical education programs, we may all move closer to achieving the mission of physical

education in Saskatchewan schools, "the development of lifelong learners who readily participate in meaningful physical activity on a regular basis" (Saskatchewan Education, 1992, p.3).

Conclusion

Although I am no longer in daily contact with the young women who were involved in the study I feel that in many ways they are always with me. The months spent watching and listening to them have had a profound impact on me. I now read and listen differently. I frequently wonder if those who speak and write about physical education issues that directly impact on young women have involved them in their work. I want to know if they valued young women enough to give them a voice and if they listened, understood, and if this has affected their beliefs and actions.

During this study I have listened and I have tried to understand. I know that when I return to my job as a teacher educator I will try my best to convey the importance of this understanding to students I teach. I hope that I never again discuss issues that impact on young people in physical education without giving them a voice. I will try to remember the importance of doing what van Manen (1991) suggests, "if only the adult would really listen it might make the adult more thoughtful and understanding about the child's world" (p.84).

A word of caution. If you listen and understand, you may be deeply touched by the group of people with whom you are working. Like Ripley

(1991), I have learned that "doing research and writing a dissertation is as much a journey of self-discovery as it is a journey of discovering about what is out there" (p.329).

Even now, I often think of the young women and I wonder what has happened to them since I left. Did she have her baby? What is her life like now? Did she finish high school as she had planned? Does the abuse still continue in her home? Do they still judge themselves so harshly? Do they eat? Do they exercise? Do they like themselves? Is the future still so frightening? Did they continue in physical education or did they drop out? Is anybody listening to them? Do they ever think of me?

I am reminded of the words of DiBattista (1992) who, in recalling an experience with a young female student during her first year of teaching high school asks, "I wonder if Adrianna could ever know what she has done for me, who did so little and got so much in return" (p.55). I too wonder if the young women who were kind enough to share their experiences with me have any idea how much they gave to me. For a few months they let me into the lives that lie behind the smiles . . . for that I will be forever grateful.

Looking back, I was the one who had the once in a lifetime opportunity . . . wasn't I?

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